

## A Home from which to Watch the World Burn

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# **A Home from which to Watch the World Burn**

by [Kuraiarcoiris](#)

## Summary

Dream leaves for parts unknown after L'Manberg gets blown up the first time. He knows what will happen, but he isn't going to stop it. He's done with everyone on the server. So he builds a house far from everyone with the intent to watch the whole server and everyone on it burn.

AKA The best revenge is living well (and watching as those who mistreated you don't.)

...or so it was supposed to go.

# Watching the World Burn

## Chapter Notes

The cottagcore fics on this site are awesome. But my brain went, what if Dream ran off to live in a cottage somewhere on purpose, understanding that his inaction would lead to the destruction of the whole server? And so he does it on purpose to both live peacefully and watch those who hurt him suffer? And so this story came about.

Hope someone likes it.

TW There is a scene in this that can be rated M. If you don't do well with graphic scenes of violence, skip ahead to the break after Bad mentions the Egg doing its magic. I'll leave a note explaining what happened in that part.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Schlatt fell to the ground dead. A loud ruckus erupted around the man's corpse, and Dream took advantage of the chaos to disappear. Tommy would point out his escape at any other moment, but the elected tyrant's death would distract the brat as would the explosions that followed.

Dream sped away from L'Manberg and the chaos that would soon ensue. He passed through the Greater SMP and skirted the borders of the Badlands. Double checking the map in his head (and enjoying the freedom of running with added flips and flourishes just for the fun of it), he headed for the uninhabited forest 127 blocks away from any inhabited land.

With his axe, he felled some trees and gained wood for a house. A small house. With windows and a functioning door. The walls were wooden and a bit flimsy. The roof came out crooked. And the windows and door barely fit. But it was a house nonetheless.

Dream set up a chest and a bed. He toyed with the idea of binding a diary, but quickly ignored it. He instead got to work gathering resources. His ender chest had various useful things in it, but he needed blocks and blocks of materials. So the weapons moved to the wooden chest at the foot of the bed. His nightmare armor slid into that chest as well. He grinned at the only weapon left in his inventory and ender chest, his Nightmare axe.

Four days passed as he mined and chopped and broke blocks, gaining several stacks of useable building materials. In the middle of day five, they finally appeared.

“There you are, Dream. Everyone’s been wondering what happened to you after Schlatt’s heart attack,” said Sapnap as he entered the clearing around the house. Dream dropped his stack of carrot seeds into the ender chest and turned to face the other man. “Some of ‘em think you are behind Wilbur’s decision to blow up l’Manberg.”

“But some, he means Tommy. Though you disappearing after what happened in l’Manberg doesn’t help your case,” George said quietly. “So you want to tell everyone what was so important that you had to run right after Schlatt was defeated?”

“Given the fact that you were off building a house at the time, I don’t think you get to say anything,” said Sapnap. He pointed at the house. “Looks like Dream was taking a cue from you.”

Both of them stared at the house. Dream stood confidently by it.

“Um...that house looks like it kinda needs work, not gonna lie,” George said with a cringe. “But it’s a nice start...?”

“That looks like s—. You are so bad at building,” Sapnap grinned and chuckled. He bumped George’s shoulder with his own. “Tell you what. We’ll help you out if you ask nicely.”

“Yeah. Pretty sure the three of us can make this into as grand a place as the community house.”

Dream stood still and stared. The two looked between each other and then stared awkwardly back.

“...is something wrong?” asked George.

“Yeah, you seem a little...off today,” Sapnap said with a crooked grin. Dream did not reply. “Okay...Are you going to come back with us or not?”

Dream took a deep breath.

“...I hate you,” Dream whispered. His voice was quiet and hoarse, but by the way the other two stiffened, they heard him.

“...what?” Sapnap half-gasped.

“I hate you,” Dream said louder. He held up the two compasses in his hand. George and Sapnap’s eyes grew wide at the sight and wider still as Dream smashed the locators into the ground. Dream turned away from them and ran into the few remaining trees.

“Dream! Wait! What do you mean you hate us?!” George said as he ran after Dream. Dream ran faster. The chase wouldn’t last long. “DREAM!”

“Come back, coward! You can’t just say that and leave! How could you—you rat b—! Do years of friendship mean nothing to you! You—you—Tommy’s right! You’re a monster who doesn’t care about anything but himself! Now get back here so I can kick your a—.”

Dream snorted and kept running. He had a head start, and for all their manhunt experience, neither of those two were fast. Not faster than him anyway. Not now when his body was back to its peak condition. They’d tire of the chase. They always did.

The noises of the two’s chase soon faded, and Dream slowed. Without the compasses, they would have no idea where he went. Bad and Ant still had one, but given their current state, they were unlikely to hand it over to those two. Dream was free.

And so he turned and headed towards the nether portal he'd set up. After crossing through it, he pulled out his diamond pick and broke the portal. Then he walked. The heat from the lava clawed at him, and his hands shook. He ignored the sensations and headed to the next portal. His breaths were hard and ragged by the time he traversed the fifty or so blocks. He threw himself into the portal.

Collapsed on the other side of the portal, Dream made a mental note. Netherite was not an option in the near future.

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Dream grinned. It wasn't made with red stone or obsidian, but wood and stone were better materials. Several stories high and carved into the mountain, his house could compare to the biggest in the server. And thanks to the snow, it would remain hidden from view unless someone decided to explore a cold mountain thousands of blocks away from the inhabited parts of the server.

Giving into the urge, Dream hummed. The tune went up and down in a nonsensical manner as Dream entered his fully completed house. The inside remained bare except for a bed, an ender chest, a regular chest, and basic cooking supplies, but he'd work on that next. For now, he grabbed some gear and put it on. He wanted to hunt mobs today, and so he would.

He carefully parkoured his way up the difficult block jumps he set up as a path over the large snow wall, and he slid down the cold snow on the other side. He lay on the cold blocks reveling in the low temperatures before standing up. He'd seen a jungle a few blocks east of here from the top on the mountain, and there was bound to be a temple there.

Humming again and allowing himself to relax at the noise, he headed east. The temperatures grew warmer, and the air more humid. His mask pressed against his moist face uncomfortably, but he didn't remove it.

He found a temple and looted it, pleased with the several pistons and diamonds found inside the temple. His grin sharpened as he cut through the vertebrae of another skeleton. He flipped and landed behind a witch, cutting her in two. He picked up the arrows and 3 glass bottles and added them into his inventory. The axe twirled in his hand expertly, and he slashed it once more through thin air.

The grin stayed on his face the whole way back to the house.

-break-

Several chests littered the hallway as he bypassed them to enter into his favorite room. A couch sat in the middle of the room surrounded by shelves of books. An enchanting table peeked through the doorway of the adjoining room. Going to a bookshelf, Dream grabbed a book and threw himself on the couch. And then an alert sounded on his communicator. As it had for days after leaving George and Sapnap. But he hadn't muted them.

With an almost audible groan, Dream looked at his communicator screen. He straightened and then leapt off the couch and hurried out the room and down the hall. When he opened the door to the outside, his inward groan became louder.

"Hullo," said the intruder. "I didn't know you lived way out here."

Dream stared as his throat tightened. No. He was fine. Part of the plan. He wanted Techno to run into him once. And not only to prove to him that he had a house.

"Sooooo...this place yours?"

Dream quietly snorted before nodding. Who else's house would it be?

"Decided to retire from all the nonsense in the middle of nowhere like I did, huh?" Techno said, though his red eyes stared strangely at Dream. The piglin hybrid shifted. "We're neighbors now. Sort of. I live seven hundred blocks further east." He pointed the way with his sword.

Dream nodded though he already knew.

Techno shifted again and then opened his mouth again.

“Didn’t stick around for the aftermath of Schlatt’s defeat. Missed a pretty epic fireworks show, if I do say so myself. Didn’t expect Wilbur to go off the deep end like that.”

Dream cocked his head as if confused.

“Turns out Wilbur was the traitor. He blew up L’Manberg,” Techno said, and his gaze narrowed. Dream shrugged and opened the door slightly wider. The cloak he wore hid his traitorous trembling. “Is that an invitation?”

Dream nodded. Techno squeezed inside, and Dream headed towards the kitchen. As expected, Techno followed. The cloak hid Dream’s hunching shoulders and then the way they loosened. He was Techno’s equal again. And the piglin hybrid had better manners than to attack a man in his own home.

“Funny. I remember you being much chattier,” Techno said as they entered the kitchen.

Dream took a breath and gripped the inside of his cloak.

“...not much to say...,” Dream croaked. The words faded before articulating “out here,” but honestly they came out clearer than he’d hoped.

The words earned him a sharp, red gaze.

“How long have you been alone up here?” Techno asked bluntly. Dream took another breath.

“...since Schlatt more or...,” Dream rasped.



“No offense. But you sound like you haven’t talked to anyone in years. And for you, that’s saying something.”

A quiet wheeze escaped Dream, and his hidden lips quirked upwards. He reached for two cups and placed them on the counter between them.

“...who I used to...be.”

“Look. I’m not much of a conversationalist myself, but if you need to talk, and given the pathetic state your voice, you need to talk-then I don’t mind putting up with your chatter. I didn’t know that chattering was something you did out of necessity. I thought you were just an annoying chatterbox. But if you need the practice, you can come...ugh, bother me sometime. As long as it’s not daily, I don’t mind. Terribly.”

Dream hummed as he poured hot water into the cups and over the tea bags. An open invitation. Never had that before. Not going to use it. Couldn’t trust it.

“...honey?”

“Sounds good.”

Grabbing the jar from the nearby cabinet, he set it between them. Techno opened it and dumped a good portion of it in his tea. The jar slid to Dream who put two spoonfuls in his cup like a civilized person.

“...have something you might...want.”

“Really?” The sharp, red eyes returned. “And you’ll give it to me, no strings attached.”

“...one string,” Dream said as he put up one finger, leaning forward on the elbow of that arm. He sipped at his tea with his other hand. He had Techno’s full attention. “Pay Punz to protect

you.”

“Hyeh?!” The cry was as effective and as amusing as Dream thought it should be. “Why would I do that? I’m Technoblade. I don’t need a goon to protect me.”

Dream sipped the tea through the enchantment of his mask and waited.

“...okay there was that one time. But it was for the clout! I’m perfectly capable of protecting myself! No way am I using my hard earned riches to pay some goon to try to do it for me.”

Dream placed a diamond block on the counter beside Techno.

“...give him that, and tell him it is to help you out once. It should be enough.”

“And what do you get out of this?” The red eyes had narrowed into slits. “Why would you want to protect me anyway?”

“Satisfaction,” Dream said in a sigh. A pickaxe between another monster’s teeth. He finished the last of his tea. “Time to go.”

“...why do I feel like my visit was expected?” Techno said, the eyes still narrowed. Dream shrugged and took the piglin hybrid’s near empty cup. “I suppose you want a favor from me in return for all this?”

“...worthless,” Dream hissed and then bit the inside of his lip.

“What?”

“Don’t want it,” Dream bit out, keeping his posture still and even. He carefully placed the cups into the sink. “Go home.”

“Did you call a favor from THE Technoblade worthless?” Techno growled. Dream spun around to face the piglin hybrid, but the warrior’s expression was less angry and more confused. “What is wrong with you? Are you really the Admin of this server?”

A sigh slipped past his mask, and Dream held up his hand as he messed with the server’s code. A Netherite ingot sat in his hand. He flexed his hand, and it disappeared. No point gaining it that way. But he did gain Techno’s attention.

“You’re up to something,” Techno said. Dream shrugged again. He was not doing anything but saving a man’s life. But the suspicion made sense. “Thank you for your hospitality. I’m heading home now.”

Dream followed and watched the pigling leave through the tunnel he had made in the snow. Must have been wondering about the odd shape of the mountain as Dream guessed he would. Time to truly hide his base away. He didn’t want or expect repeat visits. Reaching into the code once more, he began to place the Admin-only blocks.

By the next day, Dream’s house was surrounded by a dome of barrier blocks.

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He stood in the Nether, heat pressing all around him. His breaths hitched in his throat, but he continued breathing. Two more minutes and Dream would reenter the portal and his house’s second basement.

A snorting squeal caught his attention. A baby zombie piglin on a chicken raced towards Dream. The zombie piglin tumbled off the chicken as the animal fell dead several blocks away from Dream. The baby zombie piglin gave a pathetic squealing wheeze as it got up and kept running. Nightmare materialized in Dream’s hand, and the thing stopped with a grunting, squealing snort in front of him.

Several unzombified piglins ran out of the warped forest with golden swords and crossbows. An arrow whizzed right through the remnants of the baby zombie piglin's ear. It gave a deep pained grunt and squeal and then curled up into a ball. Another arrow barely missed the thing's head.

Charging forward, Dream sped past the quivering baby to the hostile piglins. Once Nightmare had dispatched one, all of the piglins' attention turned to him. He grinned savagely behind his mask and slashed, parried, and countered. Soon the patch of nether waste had a layer of piglin corpses.

Pants came out instead of hitched breaths, and Dream stored Nightmare. He stretched, pumped his arms, and silently screamed in triumph. Twirling around to return to the portal, he caught sight of two mismatched eyes staring at him. He briefly tensed, but the baby zombie piglin gave a quiet questioning snort.

Dream rolled his eyes and walked back to the portal. He heard little chirping squeals and then hurried footsteps behind him. As he stood in the portal, a tiny body squeezed in next to him. A white and hollow pair of eyes looked around Dream's basement in wonder.

Ignoring the tiny creature, Dream broke the portal and then mined the obsidian. He didn't want unexpected visitors using the portal to enter his domain. He wanted no one else here. And yet tiny snorting squeals of delight followed him up the stairs to his main rooms.

The tiny thing followed Dream into the kitchen as he made himself a hearty meal of steak and carrots. He might have made a little too much, so he handed the extra to the tiny thing. It demolished the small portion and looked up with mismatched hope. With a sigh, Dream gave it his portion too and resigned to make himself some more.

Once he finished, Dream grabbed a book and headed for the couch, ignoring the tiny beat of footsteps behind him. He sat down on the couch and the thing sat on the floor next to his legs. Somewhere halfway through the book, a tiny body pressed against his calf. Dream let it.

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Peace giggled as he peeked out from behind the chest at the edge of the field Dream was working in. Dream deliberately did not look in the direction of the sound and kept planting the new carrot seeds. The patter of tiny steps squished through the wet dirt, and right as they stepped within a three block range of Dream, he threw a golden carrot out of his inventory.

The squelching steps lunged towards the golden carrot, and Dream spun and caught the baby zombie piglin before he could touch the fallen carrot. Very loud grunting squeals tore out of the tiny piglin. Dream chuckled near silently and reached over to grab the carrot. The tiny piglin's squeals reached a painful pitch. Dream stuck the golden carrot into the squealing mouth, and painless, precious silence followed.

The silence broke with pleased little squeaks. A head bumped the bottom of Dream's jaw, and Dream replied by angling his head and mask to tap it gently against the tiny half-exposed skull. The tiny piglin tapped back.

And then the ground broke open 15 blocks away from them. Dream adjusted the grip around the tiny piglin and watched as a blond head poked out from the hole and looked around in confusion. His arms shook, and he spun away from the head and ran towards the house.

A yell burst out behind him, but Dream ignored it. He slammed the door open and dropped Peace inside. He pointed up the ladder. Mismatched confusion stared up at him. He pointed firmer at the stairs and grunted. The grunt startled Peace, but he quickly scrambled up the stairs. Just in time because the yelling was now comprehensible.

“—ot gonna hurt you! I just wanted to know what was inside this f— huge mountain! I didn't think I'd find anyone all the way out here in the middle of f— nowhere—”

Straightening, Dream turned to face the intruder.

“—ice house and—F—!” Tommy yelled the last word, cutting off his own cheerful chatter. Dream expected the reaction to having a full view of his mask. A sword appeared in Tommy's hand, and he growled, “What the f— are you doing here?!”

“...it’s my house,” Dream spoke. He hoped the words sounded mysterious instead of weak to the brat’s ears.

“How dare you! You—you f—! After what you did to us—to L’Manberg, to Wilbur, you dare to—to show your f— face!”

Dream tilted his head and then tapped his mask.

“Don’t—! You know what I mean you f—.”

“...this is my house. You came here,” Dream said quietly. Didn’t want to waste his breath, but he owed the brat one chance. He’d already gotten revenge on this one. The brat had suffered, more or less, but if he pushed—nevermind, he would. He would push. Who was Tommy if he didn’t push? Once he did, Dream would owe him nothing. “...tea?”

“Tea? Tea! Why would I want f— tea?! What about me screams I want tea right now?” Tommy yelled. His face had gone an amusingly dark shade of red.

“...you’re British?” Dream said with a hidden smirk.

“Oh, yes. Thank you so much for that, Dream. That’s all I needed today. To have a f— stereotype pushed into my face.”

“...so no tea?”

“What the f— is wrong with you?!” Tommy screamed. He swung the sword at Dream, who kicked the door behind him closed and dodged. Tommy kept swinging the sword at Dream, and Dream kept dodging. Dream’s patience was running low.

He lead the boy over to the tilled field and then waited for a particularly strong swing. He dodged and then tripped the brat over the uneven ground. Tommy fell face first in the mud.

And then Dream sat on him.

“...what do you want, Tommy?”

“Your head on a f— platter!” he shouted as he flailed about trying to get out of his pinned position. Dream grabbed the brat’s hands to keep the flails from doing any damage.

“...anything else?”

“Why? You going to help like you helped Pogtopia against Schlatt. Give us stuff and then convince someone to blow their own dream up?” Tommy spat. “Yeah, no f— thanks.”

“Then leave,” Dream hissed. The grip on Tommy’s hands squeezed. “And don’t come back.”

“Okay okay okay,” Tommy chattered back. He rocked back and forth to get Dream off him, or tried to. Dream didn’t give the brat much wiggle room. “Just let me go!”

“No,” Dream said. The brat would lunge at him the minute he was up. Dream didn’t care to play the brat’s game anymore. He reached into his inventory and retrieved one of his emergency-only items. He took the potion bottle, unstopped it, and poured it over Tommy’s head. The boy sputtered and curse even as his struggles lessened.

The boy’s movements had grown sluggish and weak. Dream then stood and grabbed the brat by the back of his shirt (he almost grabbed the brat by his hair, but in the end he didn’t care enough) and drug the lethargic but loudly cursing brat to the barrier blocks. He vaguely considered contacting a certain demon through his comm, but no, no point bringing attention to himself at this point.

Removing two vertical blocks, Dream threw the brat out into the cold snow. He then replaced the blocks and sunk his hand into the servers code. Barrier blocks formed below in mirror to the ones above. Taking deep breaths and holding still so as not to fall over. Dream stared at the one-block wide ravine between him and Tommy.

Tommy stood and yelled as he tried to throw himself over the ravine and at Dream. He hit the invisible blocks. He pounded against them and bashed them with a sword until the sword broke. Dream watched, breathing deeply and subtly.

Tommy broke the block beneath him and tried to cross the barrier block-filled ravine with no effect. He kept digging. Dream watched as the brat descended fifteen blocks straight down and found a stone block in front of him. Smirking, Tommy broke the rock and tried to cross the curve of the ravine. It didn't work, and he cursed.

Taking out a gapple and munching on it, Dream hummed. The brat descended further and under the curve of the ravine. He wondered if he would have a huge hole between the barrier and the rest of the snow wall in the morning. Shrugging, he headed back to his house. He had an overdue talk about strangers to have with Peace.

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The hole between the barrier blocks and what was left of the snow stretched seven or eight blocks wide and dozens wide. But no blond brat extended it further. An obvious hole had appeared in the snow wall. Dream decided to stay in his temperature-controlled fields for the time being. Peace trotted behind him and made messy piles over too many seeds. Dream let him.

Weeks passed, and his farm had enough food to fill a recently constructed barn full of chests. Only one room for one purpose. Dream knew it was time for different supplies. He made a large basket and sewed on straps to sling it over his shoulder. He then grunted loudly for Peace to come over and had him crawl in the basket. The tiny zombie piglin did with a chirping squeal, and Dream slung the now full basket over his back. Another squeal pierced through the basket weave.

Dream looked over his shoulder, and wide, mismatched eyes peered over the side of the basket. They fell on Dream's face, and a distinctly happy squeak came from beneath them. A tiny head tapped awkwardly at his jaw, and Dream reached over and tapped the tiny exposed frontal bone. The mismatched eyes blinked.



Huffing out a snorting chuckle, Dream headed down to the basement. He entered the Nether portal, and the world swirled. And then the heat hit. He breathed, but his own breaths threatened to slip out of his control. No. He took a step out of the portal and focused on the odd lumps on the ground that were all that remained of a horde of piglins.

He then took out a golden helmet and placed it on his head. He took out a smaller one and placed it on the head sticking out of the basket. The immediate pleased squeaking squeals had Dream's lips turning upwards, but he trudged forward.

He soon found some wandering piglins and stood close enough to let them see him but far enough to sprint back to the portal if he needed too. They saw him and made no move to approach. The gold that glittered barely got more than a passing glance. Following one of the closest piglins, he broke the ground around it and trapped it in a hole. The piglin shot him a glare and gave him a questioning grunt.

Dream dropped in some gold bars, and the pigling gave an approving low-pitched squeal. He tossed out some glowstone dust. Useful. He picked it up and went to put in his inventory. A questioning squeaking grunt stopped him. Mismatched eyes stared at the glittering dust. With a little sigh, he handed the dust over his shoulder. Another happy squeal sounded, and Dream smiled.

He tossed more gold at the adult piglin who was looking at his basket suspiciously. The basket was quickly forgotten as the gold was grabbed. Dream picked up the resulting string and stuck it into his inventory before the happy squeals over his shoulder could notice.

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The hole sat between the barrier blocks and the replenished snow wall. Snow had filled it in so that it wasn't as deep, but it was still visible. A figure stood on the other side of the hole from where he had slid down the snow wall, and Dream stared across the hole at him.

"Hey! I heard you were here!" the dark, red-toned demon called from the outside edge of the hole. "How you doing?"

Dream grunted before registering what he was doing and switching to human words.

“...okay.”

“Okay? That’s good to hear,” replied Bad in his usual chipper tone. “Though I don’t know if living here in the middle of nowhere is really good for you.”

“...I have plants.”

“Really? In a snow biome? How?”

“...I’m the Admin,” Dream answered with a shrug.

“Guess you’ve got a point about that!” Bad said with his wide smile returning. “Speaking of, I was wondering...have you heard about the Egg?”

“...I know about it.”

“Yeah, so, the Egg, it’s wonderful. Really helpful. That’s all it wants to do. *Help* people. Give us whatever we want, you know. And so, we were chatting about you, and the Egg wants to meet you.”

“...I’m sorry.”

“Oh! I know it sounds weird since you haven’t met it yet, but it really does—”

“I’m going to let the server go to Hell.” The words nearly snapped the grin off Bad’s face. If they had, maybe Dream would have taken them back. But the grin grew wider instead.

“Excuse me?” Bad said in forced cheer.

“Tell the Egg I won’t get in its way. It can do whatever it wants. Leave me and this place alone, and it can have the rest of the server.”

“...you’ll just give it the rest of the server?” Bad said incredulously. The grin remained.

“...all I want is to be left alone,” said Dream. He didn’t shift. He didn’t retract the statement. He didn’t include watching those hypocrites, liars, and self-righteous murderers on the rest of the server burn. “Leave me alone, and I will not step in.”

“Leave you and that’s it? The rest of the server is the Egg’s?” Bad stared at Dream’s mask as if he could determine Dream’s true intentions. As if Dream hadn’t just stated them to his face. Dream turned and headed back to his house. No point continuing with this facsimile of a conversation. Either the Eggpire would believe him or it wouldn’t. Didn’t matter.

He opened the door and gave a deep grunt. A tiny body sped out from behind a shelf and slammed into Dream. Dream smiled but then realized the tiny piglin couldn’t see it. He put his hand on his mask, hesitated, but then pushed it aside to knock his forehead against Peace’s. Peace squealed happily and gave a harder knock back. Dream’s limbs and breath stayed steady.

Dream chuckled and headed to the basement. The tiny zombie piglin in his arms stilled as Dream grabbed the large basket beside the half-broken portal. With another squeal, Peace threw himself into the basket, and Dream tutted at him. Slinging the basket onto his shoulders, he placed the missing obsidian onto the portal. With a flick of flint and steel, the purple swirls filled the arch.

He moved to place the mask back on his face. A tiny head smacked into his cheek, and his hand fell off his mask. A tiny squeak kept him from adjusting the mask again. Pressing his own cheek onto a tiny exposed skull, Dream stepped into the swirls and disappeared.

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While breaking the gold ore nether block, Dream noticed a red pattern appeared on the block behind it. He blinked at the winding red vine and then groaned. Someday he would think things through.

He turned around and headed back to the portal. He grunted to the clan of piglins wandering nearby. One grunted back, and Dream pointed to the vines. He grunted deeply and shook his head. The piglin nodded and grunted at its fellow piglins. They moved away from the vines.

A questioning squeaky grunt came from the basket, and Dream reached back and patted Peace's head. He gave a quiet grunt and felt the nod that followed. He vaguely watched the other piglins leave and then shook his head. He walked to the portal and bent to light it.

"WAIT!" came a call, startling the flint and steel out of Dream's hands. "DREAM!"

Dream grabbed the flint and steel quickly and set the portal alight. He jumped into it, and he grunted at the swirls to hurry. Another body appeared next to his, and Dream's breathing hitched and stuttered. He stepped out of the portal, slid the basket into a far corner, and loudly squealed. Next he pulled out Nightmare and pointed it at the man stepping out of the slow swirls.

As soon as the man stepped out of the portal, Dream stepped on a switch and the portal blew. Dizziness and pain swept through Dream, but he gasped and shot up out of his bed. He pulled a gapple out of his inventory as he leapt down the basement stairs. A figure stood amidst the smoke, so he threw the gapple into the charred basket and dove for Nightmare. The man nearly grabbed him in the attempt.

Dream briefly stumbled on the hole his dynamite had caused, but he quickly caught himself and grunted deeply. A grunt responded, and Dream paused. He gave another, more questioning grunt. An amused grunt came in reply. A broken totem of undying appeared in the man's hand, and Dream frowned. Techno let out a deep squeal. Dream hadn't known squeals could go that deep. He breathed and ignored the lingering heat.

"...why are you asking me for help?"

“Because you are the only one I know for sure isn’t brainwashed by that undone omelet.”

“...how are you so sure?”

“Tommy has told half the server about your impenetrable barrier blocks,” Techno said with an eye roll. “And you aren’t the sort to let yourself get brainwashed.”

“...you owe *me* a favor,” Dream said with emphasis.

“Yeah. And soon I’ll owe you two. We need a new base of operations. Our last one was compromised, and those overgrown red weeds have twisted themselves all over the server. I doubt they can reach in here.”

“...they can’t. And neither can you.”

“Come on. Don’t be like that. I already said I’d owe you another favor,” said Techno.

“Your favors are worthless,” Dream said tonelessly. Techno let out an angry grunt, and his sword in his hand. He stepped closer to Dream.

“And you’re a useless Admin. You’re *the* Admin of this server, and yet you’re letting this virus, this Egg, take over the entire server,” Techno spat out. “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

“...I’m not a good man,” Dream said as he stepped back.

“I don’t believe that,” Techno said, causing Dream to stop. Red eyes pierced into his green, and he realized he still had his mask on the side of his head. He quickly covered his face.

“Why else would you give me a totem of undying as if you knew what the Butcher Army was up to?”

“Quackity,” Dream spat. “I wanted you to wedge a pick through his teeth.”

Red eyes widened, and Dream took the distraction to finally step on the second switch. A cage fell from the ceiling to over where Techno now stood. The piglin hybrid banded his sword against the bars, but Dream threw a potion of weakness at him. He threw another just in case. A third knocked the piglin hybrid out completely.

Dream crouched and put his head between his knees. His breaths came out ragged and harsh, and then he bit back hacking sobs. He had to lose the portal. It needed to be gone. Too close. Too, too close. But then what about—

A small hand nudged Dream’s knee. The edges of the hand were hard, but the following squeak wasn’t. Dream’s arms unfolded, and a tiny body folded against his, squeezing out a place under his chin. He tightened his grip on Peace, and his breaths steadied.

First, get Techno out of his house, probably by replacing the portal. Second, break the portal permanently. Third, watch the server burn from the safety of his barrier-protected sphere.

Plan set. Dream stood and set about throwing the piglin hybrid back into the Nether.

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The water streamed down from the water source block near the edge of the fields and into the irrigation paths before finally flowing into a pond. Peace giggled as he splashed in the rivulets on the oddly warm day. Dream looked up from his harvesting to watch the tiny zombie piglin frolic through the newly planted fields. He would need a bath when they were done. Dream caught a whiff of his own scent on the breeze and wrinkled his nose. So would he.

A loud squealing war cry came from the edge of the barrier. Peace jumped at the sound. Dream grunted firmly, catching the tiny zombie piglin’s attention. With a replying squeal, Peace ran for the house. Dream pushed his mask over his face and pulled out Nightmare as he headed to the barrier.

A round object slammed against the barrier as Dream approached. Dream closed the distance enough to see that the object was the bloody remains of a severed head. The beanie on the head looked familiar—

“Quackity’s head,” came a hard, deep voice. Dream squinted at the thing and then nodded. That was Quackity’s smile frozen on the fool’s face. He glanced up at the angry piglin hybrid standing behind it. “That enough to earn a favor?”

Dream stared at the huffing piglin and the remnants of his snow wall. The view to his house was again unobscured. As was the view of the three following Techno. A fourth figure slumped over Phil’s shoulder.

“...one,” Dream decided. Techno had listened and come with something instead of just begging off another favor. Plus he had gotten a good look at who was over Phil’s shoulder and a plan formed. He moved three blocks to the side and away from the head with a block grin and then removed a single barrier block. “Enter.”

Niki came first, hesitant and with eyes blown wide open. She felt for the hole and squeezed through. Ranboo stared, his eyes blank and unfocused. Dream did not stare straight at them and instead looked over Ranboo’s shoulder.

“ $\Psi \wedge \overline{\Phi} \Psi \times$ .”

As Dream expected, Ranboo moved with stiff motions, and the next moment he was on the other side of the barrier. Dream would look into upgrading the barrier block’s codes to refuse entrance to teleporting Endermen. Phil came next, the body slung over his shoulder carefully placed on the floor. Niki giggled but then pulled the body of the blond teenager through the hole. Phil folded his wings into his shoulders and shimmied through the invisible blocks.

Techno glowered at Dream, and Dream let his mask impassively stare back. A snort, and then Techno bent and attempted to squeeze through. Attempted. The muscle-bound shoulders knocked against the edges of the two side blocks as the top of the half-piglin’s head hit the block above. Techno grunted several curses. He then stuck his legs through first and made it to halfway up his thighs.

A half-silent wheeze escaped Dream, and he quickly removed two other barrier blocks. Techno squeezed through the larger hole while Dream trembled to keep from releasing any noise. He quickly replaced the barrier and then ran to the house. He lost all control the moment he stepped into his house and locked the door behind him. Wheezes and chuckles escaped at every memory of invisible presses rumpling the dress shirt on wide shoulders or the bunched up mixture of thighs and the pig's dress pants.

A tiny hand poked at his side as he curled up on himself and wheezed on the floor, and reality came back into focus. With quieter wheezes, Dream sat up and stretched out his arms. A tiny zombie piglin filled up the space between them. He knocked at Dream's mask, but Dream shook his head. With grunts, squeals, and occasional squeaks, Dream explained the situation to Peace.

A knock interrupted his instructions, but Peace leapt up and ran up the stairs anyway. Dream sighed and picked himself up and opened the door.

"Do mobs spawn here?" said Phil matter-of-fact.

Grimacing behind the mask, Dream nodded and hesitantly opened his door. Phil's blue eyes widened, but he quickly stepped through the doorway with Tommy still unconscious on his back. Niki chortled and spun her way in behind him, with Ranboo blankly walking in behind her. The strange hybrid nearly looked Dream's way, so Dream looked back out the door to his remaining...guest.

"...dinner?" he whispered. Hard red eyes bore into his mask, but they flicked to his fields briefly before giving a grunt of cursing resignation.

"Have any potatoes?"

"...I have carrots."

"Close enough."



---

They all fell over at the same time. Dream walked between their twitching, semi-conscious bodies. Phil and Niki had luckily slumped over the table, but Ranboo lay fully on the floor. And Techno sat frozen next to the cot they had set up for Tommy. Tommy remained as unconscious as he had been since entering.

Had the Egg completely made then forget who the true monster of the server was?

Dream strode past Techno and yanked the unconscious Tommy off the bed. He threw the body carelessly over his shoulder and marched towards the door. He whistled, and tiny, hurried hoof beats clattered down the stairs. Dream exited his house with the tiny beats behind him and an unconscious brat slung over his shoulders.

The demon stood on the other side of the barrier blocks, less red-toned now and more red-painted. He grinned all wide white teeth at the sight of the teen packaged over Dream's shoulder.

He didn't see the tiny shadow in Dream's as it scurried onto the floor and inside a darkened shadow.

"You always were fair and honest in your dealings," Bad said excitedly. "The Egg thanks you for your sacrifice and plans to reward you handsomely."

"... don't want a reward. A deal."

"Oh...kay. What do you want? To be left alone again. Come on, Dream. You know that's not good for you. You need other people around. You've always been a people person."

"I have people," Dream said confidently. The faux confidence came easier in front of one of his manhunters, however twisted Bad was now. How else could Dream win? "Four. They are

off-limits.”

“Oh,” Bad taunted. “So that’s where they ran off to. The Egg wants all of them gone. They keep getting in the way of our glorious Eggpire. We can’t let that stand.”

“Four for one immune annoying brat that causes revolutions and problems almost by accident,” said Dream. “That is the deal. The others will stay on my land and therefore out of your way. If they leave, they’re yours. Take it or leave it.”

“Hm. What if we brought all our forces to bring your barrier down?”

“Won’t work. You know that. I am this server’s Admin.”

“And yet you let the Egg rule.”

“I let those that rejected my protection burn,” said Dream tonelessly. “I am giving four another chance. This one,” he dropped the brat on the ground between them, “has had too many.”

“Poor Tommy. He has finally run out of people to hide behind,” Bad mocked as he looked down at the crumpled body. Dream’s confidence strained. This was no longer his manhunter. “Whelp, let’s get this deal underway, shall we?”

“Step away from the barrier,” Dream said steadily. Bad stepped back several blocks, but various red vines remained pressed against the barrier. He took out an enderpearl and pressed it into Tommy’s hand. He guided the hand towards the barrier and then briefly removed one block and let Tommy’s pearl roll out of his hand and onto the red vines below. Dream slammed the barrier block back into place before the pearl hit the ground.

Two thin vines had slithered through, and Dream instantly grabbed them and broke their code down to their binary and disintegrated them. Tommy lay on the other side of the barrier. He was immediately wrapped in red vines.

A body that had been hidden in the darkness of the hole in the snow wall leapt out and rushed to Tommy's side. Tubbo grabbed his best friend's head and hugged it to his chest. Bad chuckled

"See. I told you the Egg would give you whatever you wanted," said Bad, his eyes glowing dark red.

"Tommy?" Tubbo whispered. "Tommy, come on. Wake up."

"He'll wake up," said Bad placing a hand on Tubbo's shoulder. Tubbo craned his neck to look up at the overly tall demon. "You have to let him go first and let the Egg do its magic."

"Magic?" the boy whimpered even as he released Tommy's head. Dream stared at the wide-eyed boy who had run his country to the ground in two separate timelines. The boy allowed himself to be pulled back.

A sudden wet gasp escaped Tommy. Four sharp-tipped vines dripping extra red stuck up from Tommy's chest. Gurgling screams spilled with blood out of Tommy's lips. A thicker vine wrapped itself around Tommy's mouth to muffle the screams to whines. The vines impaling his chest folded themselves back down, pierced the center brat's chest, and pried the cavity open and split open his ribcage. A meaty, exposed heart beat fiercely in the open cavity. One of the vines that split open Tommy's ribcage slid onto his heart. Blue eyes shot open.

Blurily the blue eyes shot back and forth before settling onto their owner's open chest. The struggles jerked through the brat's torso and legs, but the red vines limited the actual amount of movements to twitches. A whining scream pitched high and piercing through the muffling vines, but even that was limited. The sliding vine slipped under the brat's heart and wrapped it gently. All the twitches stilled. Dream stared at the wrapping vine and not the pale, obvious horror above it.

"What's it doing?" demanded Tubbo vaguely irate and panicked. The emotion came out as muffled as the brat's screams. "It's hurting him."

“Now, now,” Bad said gently. His hand still gripped Tubbo’s shoulder. “The Egg knows what it’s doing. And it’s giving our good friend here a show as it does it.”

“Does what?” Tubbo mumbled, his eyes reddening.

“Fixes him, of course,” said Bad. His teeth-white grin turns to Dream. “Right?”

Dream doesn’t respond. The wrapping vines squeezes. A heart pops. Tommy gives a keening, muffled scream. Blue eyes go bleary, wet, and then blank. The vines seep into the now less crowded cavity, weaving themselves into the remnants of the brat’s personal code. Even from the other side of the barrier blocks, the violating code slithers shivers down Dream’s body. The blank blue eyes close and then open. No white or blue remain, only deep, blood red.

The vines stitch the chest and bones closed and prop up the brat’s body even as his face looks around in wonder. The red-filled orbs that were eyes land on Dream, and the thing that was Tommy grins. Every white tooth was visible.

“Dream, thank you,” a voice that sounded like the brat said. “You’ve given me a great gift.”

“Tommy?” came a quivering, quiet voice behind the thing that was Tommy, and it turns to focus on Tubbo. “Is that you?”

“Of course it’s me, Tubs,” said the voice too much like Tommy. Tubbo runs and throws his arms around the pretender. The boy hiccups and sobs into the thing that was Tommy’s open chest. It wraps a loose arm around Tubbo. “I’ve been given a great gift from our friend Dream here. I have been chosen. The Egg and I are one and the same now.”

“The Egg?” Tubbo snuffles, a crease nearly forming between his brows. The red orbs that were eyes glow, and Tubbo’s own eyes echoed. Tubbo grins in a way that should have hurt his cheeks. “Of course! That’s so cool, Toms! Now we’ll always be with the Egg! And nothing will ever tear us apart again.”

“Of course, Tubs. Of course,” said the thing that was Tommy. It turned back to Dream as it pet Tubbo’s head mechanically. “I look forward to the next gift you see fit to give me. And don’t worry. I’ll take good care of your—ah, no, *my* server. And if you ever want your heart’s desire, make sure to let me know. Ta-ta.”

The thing that was Tommy continued to pet Tubbo as if the boy was an overly affectionate cat. The thing steered the boy back through the hole in the snow wall. Bad followed the thing that was Tommy with a skip in his step. He turned once to wave at Dream and shout his thanks. Then the group of red was gone.

Dream pressed his hand against the barrier blocks and triple checked their code. He placed several more layers of code locks and then stepped away from the wall. The vines colored with extra red remained on the other side of the barrier blocks. Dream turned away, lifted his mask, and emptied his stomach.

His eyes burned, and bile scorched his throat. His hands shook, and he clenched them into fists. His vision blurred. Bile surged back up his throat. He lurched and fell to his knees. Vomit sprayed onto his pants and hands. A third time nearly crumpled Dream fully onto the ground, but his trembling arms managed to keep him from falling face first in his own stomach acid.

Heaving heavy breaths, Dream stood and wiped remnants of the bile from the sides of his mouth. He brushed himself off and walked away from the vile, chunk-filled pile. A small squeal separated from a shadow and latched onto to Dream’s dirty pant leg. Dream tugged Peace off, but the tiny zombie piglin took advantage of the movement to throw himself fully into Dream’s torso.

Dream’s arms automatically caught the tiny piglin, and Peace knocked his forehead against Dream’s. The smiley mask was knocked to the side due to the aggressive affection, and Dream slumped onto the ground. Peace pressed his tiny head into the side of Dream’s neck, and Dream clutched the tiny piglin tightly. A harmless body fluid splashed onto Peace’s head, and Peace grunted and squeaked. Dream didn’t respond, instead pressing his cheek against Peace’s forehead.

The squeaks and grunts got more persistent.

Dream whispered in full Human into Peace's uncomprehending ear.

"...monster."

---

Darkness deepened the shadows around the house, and Dream hoisted the tiny body in his arms closer to his chest. He opened the door and jumped back as a sword slashed through now empty air. He squeaked, and the tiny body stirred. Another swing, another dodge. Mismatched eyes opened wide, and Peace squealed.

The squeal halted the next blow slightly, enough for Dream to duck under it. Peace leapt out of Dream's arms and grabbed the grown piglin hybrid's arm. Tiny teeth pierced through the silk shirt. Techno let out a squealing roar, and Peace was thrown onto the ground. Dream caught the tiny zombie piglin before he hit the ground.

Techno crumpled onto the ground. His body shook with tremors.

Dream grunted as he placed Peace on the ground. The tiny zombie piglin squeaked softly, staring at the twitching piglin hybrid. Placing a hand on the small skull, Dream squeaked back. Peace stared at him, and then ran into the house. He listened to the tiny patter of steps, and then he turned to the man bent in two. He sat next to him.

"...I can stop it."

"..ghrk...then do it," Techno said in a grumbling, pained mutter.

"I will. But it will cost you another favor."

"Aren't...huff...those worthless to-gahk-to, to you," Techno continued through his clenching teeth. Various patches of pink skin faded to grey.

“Yes,” Dream said calmly. “But this is not one you can brush off as if I didn’t ask. And it won’t cost you much. Protect me and those who are under my protection for as long as you are in my barrier. Make sure we come to no harm to the best of your ability. That is all.”

“Under...aah...your protection?” Techno huffed.

“Like those you brought to me,” Dream said plainly. Teeth clattered together loud, but a hiss escaped anyway. Techno shuffled.

“Tommy?”

“Gone,” said Dream. His voice remained steady even as he stole an extra breath. “Too much risk. Doesn’t trust me. And the Egg has Tubbo. He would have put the rest of us in danger.”

“How do you—Ack!” Techno squealed as his body spasmed.

“Agree to the favor, and I’ll undo it. Now.”

“Fi—squeee.” Pink-nearing-grey hands clutched at the grass, and Dream pressed a hand against Techno’s head. The piglin hybrid’s code ran through his vision, and he found the altering sickly green code. He extracted it from the pink and red, and Techno’s whole body slumped onto the ground. Pants escaped the large warrior, and Dream stood.

“Protect me and mine, and I’ll protect you and yours,” Dream said as he walked back to his house. “Don’t and you forfeit any hope of safety. The barrier is tied to my life. If you killed me, the barrier blocks would cease to exist.”

He stood in the doorway and peered over his shoulder.

“...don’t become a risk,” Dream whispered, but blood red eyes focused on him. He headed up the stairs, glimpses of slumped bodies visible through the open kitchen door. He took a deep breath, finished hurrying up the steps, closed his bedroom door, and placed barrier blocks behind the entrance.

## Chapter End Notes

The TW Violent scene summarized: The Egg's vines kill Tommy and then the Egg takes over Tommy's body. Also Dream vomits right after The Egg group leaves, finds Peace, hugs him tightly, and whispers "monster."



# Making Mistakes

## Chapter Summary

How do you protect people who think you're a monster? In all honesty, you don't.

## Chapter Notes

Warning: Everyone is on their worst behavior. Try not to judge anyone too harshly.

Also if I didn't know any better, I would say this chapter gained sentence simply for the purpose of fighting me every step of the way. Hopefully it isn't as bad as it has convinced me it is...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Where is Tommy?”

Dream turned from where he had been eating his steak to face sharp, hard blue eyes. Wide open grey wings loomed over his head as the Avian stepped forward as if to corner Dream. The young Admin stepped to the side and then under the wings to reach the kitchen's entrance, keeping steady control of his breaths.

“Techno believes that you threw Tommy out,” hissed Phil, and Dream stood in the doorway. “But Wilbur wrote a lot about you in his letters. So I doubt you just threw my son's younger brother figure out of your barrier and were done with it.”

“...what do you think I did?” Dream said softly.

“Did you murder a child and throw his body for the mobs to find?”

Dream took a deep breath and straightened.

“Tell the others to meet me in the basement.” He didn’t look back at the man who had slain his own son and instead headed down the stairs. Once. He’d explain once. And if they left, they left. But they would not take him or Peace. They came here. He didn’t go looking for them.

Obsidian block was placed over obsidian block as he remade the Nether portal. Flint and steel rested in his hand as his four “guests” came down. Ranboo stared at him and shivered while Niki slumped onto the tall enderman hybrid’s shoulder. Her eyes were blurry and unclear even as the tall boy’s flickered about. Techno marched behind them, an ugly grimace twisting his face. Phil came last, and the Avian’s face remained blank and hard.

Dream breathed as a small tremor clicked the flint and steel together. Iron-clad control stopped the slight sound and firmed up Dream’s shoulders.

“Tommy was a risk,” Dream said steadily. “He had shown over and over that he doesn’t trust me. And the Egg has Tubbo. Tommy would not have stayed put and would have put the rest of us in danger.”

“You don’t know that,” Ranboo protested. His eyes looked everywhere but at Dream. “Tommy knew the dangers of the Egg. He wouldn’t—he wouldn’t have put all of us in danger like that.”

“If it had given him a chance at saving Tubbo, he would have,” said Dream, twitching.

“How do you know the Egg has Tubbo?” asked Niki, her voice echoing exhaustion. Even after various hours of forced sleep.

“Does it not have everyone else on the server?”

The four flinched, and Dream made a mental note. Where had Quackity’s head come from?

“Tommy would put Tubbo’s safety over anyone else’s. And that is assuming the Egg doesn’t have his disks.”

“Disks? His music disks?” Ranboo asked as his red and green eyes landed fully on Dream. “What do those have to do with anything?”

“Tommy cares about those disks more than his own life or that of anyone else’s,” Dream said plainly. How new was Ranboo to the server at this point? Dream vaguely considered getting a book to keep better track of these details. He shook his head. He could trust his own mind.

“Wilbur mentioned those disks,” Phil said slowly. His forehead wrinkled. “Cat and Mellohi if I remember from the letters. But surely Tommy wouldn’t risk anyone’s life over those.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Niki snorted. Phil and Ranboo turned to stare at her, but she shrugged and said nothing else. Phil straightened and turned back to Dream.

“Whether Tommy is or isn’t a risk is not important. What you did to him is. So I ask again, *where is Tommy?*”

“The Egg,” Dream said as his throat closed. Bile burned inside it.

“The Egg has Tommy?!” Phil cried, screeched really. Dream stood firm. “Do you know what it wants to do to him?!”

“Of course he does,” said a gruff flat voice. The other three turned their attention to the unusually quiet Techno. “He likely watched the undone omelet do it.”

“I did,” Dream admitted. Hiding what he’d seen (what he’d done) was pointless. They either chose to attack him or they didn’t. Their lives lay in their own hands.

“You f— b—!” said Phil. A sword materialized in his hand, and he lunged at Dream. Nightmare appeared, but before he could swing it up in his defense a large hand grabbed Phil’s wrist. and twisted the sword out of the Avian’s grip. “Tech! What are you doing?!”

“Repaying a favor,” said Techno in a growl. Cold, red eyes promised murder at the first convenient moment, but the piglin hybrid did not let go of Phil’s wrist. “Tommy’s gone. And killing the only one strong enough to provide a yolk-free zone will not bring him back.”

“He let the Egg overwrite Tommy’s code!” Phil hissed as he struggled. “He’s every bit the monster and tyrant Wilbur said he was.”

“He let the Egg overwrite Tommy’s code?” Ranboo whispered in horror. Wide green and red eyes quivered in Dream’s direction. Niki whistled.

“That’s cold. Even for you,” she said. Her face was wiped clean of emotion. “Did you hate the kid that much?”

“No,” Dream said softly. He could admit that. No one would hear him. But then Niki blinked and tilted her head.

“Then why’d you do it?”

That earned Dream the full attention of everyone in the room. He swayed briefly, but he did not run.

“He was a safety risk. And I could trade your lives for his.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Phil hissed. His wings had flared fully open, but Dream kept his feet planted onto the floor and his breathing steady. These wings were large and dark. He had no reason to cower. He remembered the head splattered on the other side of the barrier, and his breaths came out easier.

“...the Egg and I have an understanding,” said Dream. They would chose to leave, and his home would stay safe. “It leaves me alone, and I do not interfere with it.”

“You what?!” Phil full-on screeched. He ripped his arm out of Techno’s hold and grabbed his sword with both hands. He leapt at Dream, wings adding thrust to the attack. Dream raised Nightmare, but again Techno grabbed the Avian, this time by his waist, and held him still. The sword stayed pointed at Dream. It swiped futilely in Dream’s direction. “You are this server’s Admin! And you—you just let it ruin the server—your server—as long as it leaves *you* alone!”

“It would have tried to break through my barrier blocks harder once it realized you were here,” said Dream, Nightmare still raised but his voice steady. “But then I saw Tommy, and I knew it wanted him. So I adjusted the terms of our deal to include you four.”

“Why?” asked Niki blankly, as if not interested in the answer. She likely wasn’t.

“Because you asked,” Dream said. He should have said no. His legs ached from standing still.

“I don’t think any of us wanted to be safe at the cost of Tommy’s soul,” Ranboo said in a husky, wet tone. Red and green eyes focused on a wall behind Dream’s head. “Tommy was a person too.”

The bile returned, but Dream pushed it down. He had one more thing to say, and then he would relieve the ache in his legs.

“You can leave then.”

With that, he lit the Nether portal. Dream turned, his grip on Nightmare tight and his senses on full alert, and hurried up to his room. He removed the barrier blocks, closed the door behind him, and replaced them. Peace leapt into his arms, and he wrapped himself around the

tiny zombie piglin. He waited for the noises of people plundering his house, the alerts that would sound as they entered the Nether, and then the silence that would follow their exit.

He heard shuffling up the stairs, loud half-intelligible conversations, and then muffled words and other miscellaneous clattering. The noises floated up from the first floor for the rest of the day.

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The hoe hit the ground and broke it into dirt. The sharp wide metal dug a trench of a few inches into the earth before it rose again and hit the ground again. The night wind blew onto Dream's face and cooled the sweat gathering on his forehead. Making three new fields might have been much for one night.

A delighted squeal sounded next to him, and a small sharp hand tugged at his sweatshirt. He looked down as Peace pointed at the row he hoed earlier. The trench had become one long mound likely filled with wheat seeds. Dream patted the tiny skull, and it nuzzled his hand.

"What is that?" asked a voice. Dream instantly grabbed Peace's shirt and shoved him into the basket over his shoulder. He then spun and pointed his hoe in the voice's direction. "Relax. I wasn't going to attack you. That would be suicidal in various ways."

Dream held his stance steady as pink hair and a black sweater was highlighted by moonlight.

"Techno explained about the barrier blocks. Good thinking on that, because if not I'm sure Phil would have killed you by now."

He tilted his head and let his mask stare at the woman in front of him.

"What happened to you? You used to be one of the chattiest people on this server. On several servers actually."

“...does it matter?”

“I guess not,” said Niki with a shrug. Dream dropped the hoe to his side and then stood still. The woman stepped closer and around Dream’s side. He turned to follow her, leaving the basket out of her reach. She stopped. “You know I won’t hurt it.”

Dream shrugged. He knew nothing of the sort.

“So Tommy...,” Niki started after a long pause. “Can’t say I’m too broken up that he’s gone.”

He hummed quietly, and she nodded.

“I wanted him dead. Tried to kill him myself various times. But what the Egg wanted to do to him—did to him if what you said is true—wouldn’t wish that on anyone.”

“...neither would I.”

Niki nodded again, as if she believed him. She didn’t. No one ever did when he told them anything they didn’t already believe.

“So you aren’t planning to do that to the rest of us?”

A huffing sigh muffled into his mask, and Dream turned away from Niki. Keeping a loose eye on her, he swung his hoe up and smacked it hard into the ground.

“You know that’s not an answer.”

He swung and broke the ground. The woman watched but didn’t move closer. He finished the trench. Taking out a stack of weed seeds, he sprinkled the tiny, life-giving seeds into the last

bit of broken ground. He then pushed the ground back into the trench and over the seeds with his foot. Niki moved closer, and he paused.

“Want some help?”

The mask faced her, and hidden green eyes stared into dark, shadowy brown. Dream split the remaining stack in half and handed a half to her. She nodded again and strode to the other end of the trench. With careful mimicry she matched his actions, and they soon met in the middle of the now fully planted trench.

Dream handed her his hoe. She walked to the other end of the field and stood next to the finished trench. He sped to his end of the field and took out a newer hoe. He swung and broke the earth. She copied. And they were soon back in the middle. He handed her a full stack of wheat seeds.

An hour later the field was fully sown, and the two sat side by side on the grass nearby. Dream took out two bottles of water and bread. He split the bread in half and gave half to Niki. She took it, sniffed it, shrugged, and took a big bite. Dream nibbled on his as he handed her one of the bottles. She sniffed it after opening but quickly took a swig.

“His name’s Peace,” Dream whispered. Pink hair whipped across the woman’s face as her head snapped towards him. He removed the basket from his back and grunted. A tiny head peeked over the basket’s rim. Dream gave another grunt, and the tiny zombie piglin tumbled out of the basket. Peace sat in Dream’s lap. Mismatched hollow eyes watched the woman with wide wonder.

“Hi,” Niki whispered, her hand splayed in an unmoving wave. Peace squeaked and lifted his hand to match hers. She smiled. “Aren’t you cute?”

Peace squealed squeakily and smiled back. Niki tore a piece off her bread and held it out.

“Want some?”



Mismatched eyes blinked and then flicked up to Dream. Dream gave a small nod, and Peace squeaked and stretched out to take the scrap of bread. He stuck it into his mouth immediately with muffled squeals. Niki giggled.

“Nice to meet you, Peace.”

Peace squeaked again and stretched out his hands towards Niki’s bread. Dream grunted and squealed, catching the tiny zombie piglin’s attention. He gave the tiny zombie piglin half of his. The half was gone almost instantly.

“Does he get very hungry?”

“Sometimes,” Dream said quietly. He gave Peace the rest of his bread. “I’d eat the rest of your bread before he finishes.”

“Will do,” Niki said. She swallowed the bread and grinned at his stare. “Since I helped you plant the wheat, mind if I use some once it grows?”

“...no. Take what you need,” Dream whispered. He picked up Peace, dumped him in the basket, and headed back to the house. He kept his ears trained to hear the whistle of a sword or the sigh of an axe. Or even the hack of a hoe. But he only heard swishing water and felt a loaded gaze on his back.

---

Peace dozed on his lap as Dream flipped to the next page of *A Guide to Crop Rotation*. A bang on the wall startled Peace awake, and limp fingers dropped the guide. Angry, frustrated red eyes glared at Dream from the doorway. Dream picked his book up, pushed Peace back onto his lap, and let his mask stare back.

“Let me in.”

Dream shook his head and then reopened his book. Another bang made Peace whimper, and Dream looked up and glared at the piglin hybrid in the library doorway.

“We need access to your books,” the piglin hybrid growled. A moment of staring, and Dream gave another muffled sigh. He shifted Peace and pointed to the basket next to the couch. Peace obediently slipped into it. Dream swung the basket onto his shoulders. He then stepped forward and removed the barrier blocks. He brushed past the piglin hybrid and into the hall. A frustrated snort sounded behind him, and then a hand clamped onto his shoulder.

Nightmare slashed centimeters away from retreating fingers.

“Okay,” Techno said slowly. The sharpness to his words dulled. “That...was an understandable response. Still I thought I should warn you that Phil doesn’t have problems going through those barrier blocks of yours. He’s an Admin too.”

“Not this server’s Admin,” Dream said, lowering Nightmare but keeping it at his side.

“No. But he has overriding power,” Techno said flatly. “And keeping him from killing you in your sleep has been cutting into mine.”

Dream tensed and gripped Nightmare tight.

“At this point, all I want to do is figure out a way to scramble that rotten Egg and get out of your hair, so if you have any ideas where I might get that information, it would be appreciated.”

“Another favor...?” Dream mumbled with a soft hum.

“You and your favors,” Techno grumbled. “Do you want to die in your sleep?”

“Yes,” Dream said, a smile twisting behind his mask. Blood eyes pinned him, and he held in a chuckle. “At a ripe old age. Look for trojan horses outside of your mythology books.”

He then headed up the stairs to his room. Once the door was closed, he triple-checked the code on the barrier blocks. Only he could access them. No back doors for other Admins or even Moderators to use. He took out the guide and settled on the floor. Peace settled back onto his lap, and the peaceful afternoon continued.

“ $\Delta \subseteq \Psi \times \Psi \subseteq \Delta \otimes \Psi \not\subseteq \Omega \cap \frac{1}{2} \Psi \Psi \wedge$ ?”

Looking up from the bread he was making, Dream screeched, “ $\sqsubseteq \Psi \neg \Psi$ .”

"𐌲𐌹𐍃𐌶 𐌸𐌺𐌰 𐌱𐌴𐌳𐌰 𐌵𐌷𐌰𐌽𐌰 𐌵𐌷 𐌸𐌼𐌻𐌰 𐌿 𐌶𐌷𐌸𐌷𐌰𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌰 𐌵𐌷𐌰𐌽𐌰," came the answering screech. The tall figure took two steps and stood next to Dream. Arching his neck, Dream met hard red and green eyes. "𐌸𐌼𐌻?"

“Ranboo?” asked an uncertain voice from the kitchen doorway. Pink hair peeked into the kitchen. Red and green eyes swung away from Dream and pinned the asker. She gulped audibly. “Oh. It’s you, Ender.”

“She knows about you?” Dream whispered in Human.

“HΨ,” said the echoing hiss. Dream nodded and took the bread off of the crafting table and placed it on the dining table.

“What you making?” asked Niki coming closer. Dream loosely flapped a hand towards the bread. “What kind?”

“Bread?” Dream said, as he flapped at the bread again.

“Basic recipe?” she asked with a wrinkle over her nose. He nodded, and she stuck out her tongue. “That’s a waste of wheat outside of an emergency.”

"It's bread," Dream said. He picked up a loaf and took a large bite.

“I see,” said Niki as her face squeezed into itself in disgust. “I thought the one you gave me was just a bad batch.”

“ $\{ \{ \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi} \neq \Delta \} \}$ ” hissed the enderman hybrid as his stare slipped back towards Dream.

“Taste it. I’m sure you’ll see what I mean,” said Niki. Ranboo shifted to stare at her and then took a loaf. His face also squeezed into itself.

“...it’s not that bad,” Dream defended as he took another bite. The bite was warm and tasted like earth. That was what bread needed to taste like.

“ $\overline{1}\overline{0} \text{ i } \overline{0}\subseteq\triangle\overline{0} \equiv\triangle\overline{0}$ ,” hissed Ranboo as he placed the bread back onto the table. “ $\subseteq\triangle\overline{0}\overline{0}\overline{0} \not\subseteq\triangle\overline{0} \triangle\overline{0}\overline{0}\overline{0} \overline{0}\subseteq\triangle\overline{0} \triangle\overline{0}\subseteq\overline{0}\triangle\overline{0} \triangle\overline{0}\overline{0}$ ?”

“...it’s not that bad,” Dream repeated. He took bigger bites and finished the whole loaf. He went to grab another, but Niki smacked his hand.

“Nope. You are not going to keep eating that,” she said, her nose wrinkled and her tongue out. She put the bread in her inventory and then shoved him away from the crafting table. “First, this isn’t what you use to make proper bread.”

The crafting table folded in on itself and tucked into Niki's inventory. She grabbed an item out of the inventory, and it unfolded itself into the space the table had occupied. A furnace, but a kind Dream hadn't seen outside Niki's bakery. She opened the door in the front and lit a fire with charcoal.

“Real bread is made in one of these,” she said with a grin. She then moved to the other table and took out some wheat. Dream watched as in a flurry of motion, she had taken out wheat, ground it, mixed the now flour with water and herbs, and shaped it into loaves. A tray sat under the doughy loaves. He blinked and wished he could slow down that process to see how exactly she had done that. “And now we put these in the oven.”

With a step that was more of a skip, she placed the tray in the odd furnace.

“You want one, Ender?”

[illegible]

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she said with a wide smile. The furnace dinged, and Dream hid the small jerk the sound caused. No one noticed as a warm, herbal scent filled the room. “Tadah!”

Perfectly round loaves came closer to Dream's nose, and Dream leaned forward to get a better whiff. No one baked like Niki. Not in this lifetime or the other.

He reached out to take one before reclaiming his hand and backing away.

“Come on. You have to try it. Then you’ll see why your bread was ‘that bad.’”

Dream shook his head. Ranboo snatched a loaf and bit into it.

“Hey! These are for Dream. Give that back!” Niki cried frantically, and Ranboo merely crackled in pleasure. Dream stared at the remaining bread. The motions Niki had used to prepare the bread were quick and practiced, but he hadn’t—the bread should be fine. The scent curled itself into his nostrils, and his hand settled on a loaf.

Niki turned back to Dream as he took the loaf off the tray. He moved to take a bite of it, and her grin froze. The next second, the bread was knocked fully out of his hand. The soft loaf plopped onto the ground, bounced, and then rolled. It then stopped a foot or so from their feet.

“△≡≠ 𐀀𐀁 𐀀𐀂—” The hissing words were cut off by a screech. The enderman hybrid fell forward, eyes open but body still. A specialized paralysis potion. Dream’s mask faced a trembling Niki. She threw the tray onto the floor. The bang vibrated through the room as if replacing the warm scent.

“I can’t do this,” she grit out of closed teeth. “I can’t—I can’t use my baking skills for this.”

Dream’s hand twitched, but this time he held it firm to his side instead of reaching for the distraught woman. Niki folded into herself and crouched next to Ranboo.

“Sorry, Ender. Ranboo knew the plan, and...and he was only going to pretend,” Niki muttered, but Dream could still hear her. “I thought that since...since you are awake even when he is, that then...”

The words faded, and Niki reached over to the overturned tray.

“Sorry,” she whispered as she clutched the tray. Trembling rattled through her, but then she faced Dream’s mask fully. Brown eyes shone wet. “Sorry.”

“Niki, did you find him?” called a voice from the hall. Phil entered the kitchen and opened his mouth. It quickly closed as he took in the state of the kitchen. “I see the plan didn’t succeed.”

A scoff escaped Dream, and he let Phil fully face his mask.

“...Enderwalk ate it first,” Dream said in an almost growl.

“Step away from her,” Phil hissed with a sword now in his hand. Blue eyes glittered sharply. “The plan was mine.”

“I know,” Dream said, words low and hard. “Get out of my house.”

“No. You should be the one to leave,” said Phil. “You are the one who least deserves this barrier’s protection.”

“Like son, like father,” Dream hissed. Phil’s sword twitched under the words. The Avian moved to swing it, but another voice interrupted the movement.

“Phil? Where’d you go...?” The question trailed off. A blur of pink appeared next to Phil, and tough fingers clamped around Phil’s wrist. “Phil, don’t do this.”

“An Admin’s job is to care for his server and everyone on it. Not to sit back and watch it crumble under a viral code’s influence. To let it infect and twist the code of the world and *people’s personal code* to its liking,” Phil hissed but did not struggle in Techno’s grip. “How could you live protected while the rest of the server gets coded by that virus?”

“...they didn’t want my protection,” Dream said clearly, softly. The words fell heavy through and out of his mouth. “I can’t...protecting them isn’t worth it. If you don’t want my protection, *leave*.”

“This may have been your server, but it isn’t anymore,” Phil grit out. Dark grey wings flared to either side, and Dream set his feet into the floor. He wouldn’t run. “I won’t let that malicious infected code take over this server. Give over Admin control to me.”

“No.”

“Then you leave me no choice,” Phil hissed darkly. “Your pet is upstairs in pain from a poison only I have the antidote for.”

Dream’s whole body recoiled. And then he dashed past the menacing wings, pushed the large piglin hybrid aside, and leapt up the stairs. He yanked the door to his room open. No barrier blocks stood in his way.

A snorting whimper came from his bed, and Dream collapsed next to it. Mismatched eyes were squeezed shut, and tiny beads of sweat decorated the tiny skull. Pain both familiar and burning gored through Dream’s chest as he settled a hand on the quivering skull. A keening squeal leapt out of a rasping throat, and the tiny skull pushed relaxed into the hand.

Peace’s code screamed pain. Numbers and spaces leapt against each other and swirled too fast for Dream to read or wrestle back to their original state. The goring in his chest flared with a fresh wave of horror-filled agony. He preferred the feeling of dull shears.

“You’re a fairly powerful Admin, given the power behind the barrier blocks, but you’re still young. There is no way you can undo what the poison has done without experience. And so I ask again: Give Admin control over the server to me.”

“Phil...what are you doing?” said Techno. Or it sounded like him, but there was a quaver that would never be in the powerful warrior’s voice.

“Leveraging that baby zombie piglin he’s taken in as a pet,” said Phil. Dream’s teeth grit together, but a tiny body shuddered and his body started to numb. “So what will it be? The life of your pet or your need for full control.”

“Again, Phil, what are you doing? This isn’t—” The words cut off, but Dream’s hearing was beginning to grow fuzzy. The tiny skull briefly pushed against his hand, and the eyes flew



open. A hollow squeal pleaded, and Dream automatically bent to press their heads together. The tiny skull bent away and squeaked. His hand settled on his mask but stopped.

They were silent in the doorway. Words echoed through his head, demands to remove his mask. Commands, and fingers lost as result of disobedience. The slashes earned (no—not earned) across unprotected cheeks. Wings enveloping in pain-filled shadows. A whimper snorted, and the pleading squeal returned. The mask flipped to the side of his head.

He removed his hand and pressed his forehead against a much smaller one. The squeal stopped. The tiny forehead was so hot. Hot like lava against his back, searing off flesh. He held back the white threatening to blind his vision and focused on the fluctuating code pressed against him. He watched the numbers and spaces through their pained danced. But all he could register was pain.

His lips moved, but he couldn't hear his pleas. Had Quackity blown out his eardrums today? Why was he pleading? No one heard him. They hadn't before. But Quackity always went easier when he pleaded. Pleas equal less pain. Not no pain. Never no pain. But less pain. Less pain was all he would ever have.

And then he was pulled away from the heat, the scorching pressed against his head. No! Not that pain! That pain was...it was good. It was good pain. It meant...it meant...it meant he wasn't a monster? But...he was a monster. Did the pain make him forget?

"...sh. It's okay. He'll be okay. Phil's fixing it," murmured a voice, almost gentle. Gentle? Oh no. Worse pain. He hated that one. The one where he stupidly thought— "He...he didn't really poison the kid. He gave him a zombie cure. Messed with his code, but he'll be better than ever once Phil speeds up the process. He'll be fine."

His own voice became clear in his ears. "...please...please stop...please...it hurts... pleasepleasepleaseplease..."

The word kept tumbling out over and over, as if it was the only word he knew. (It's the word Quackity had liked most.) But he couldn't stop. The pain was still there and the good pain/heat was gone. He preferred the shears.

“Okay, this isn’t working,” huffed the voice. Quackity’s? No, too deep. Sam? Was Sam here too? “Listen. Breathe. Like this.” The voice took a deep breath. Dream’s word kept tumbling. A large hand pressed against his chest. “Breathe.” The sharp command halted the word. Commands are obeyed or fingers paid the price. Or toes. Dream breathed. “Yes, like that. Again.” He took in a large inhale into his pain-filled lungs. The heat. He needed the heat. “No no no. Don’t start that again. Breathe. In.” The voice breathed in. Dream echoed the breath. “Out.” The voice breathed out. So did Dream.

The pattern continued for thirty or so more times before the chill in the room registered. It wasn’t hot. Not lava hot. Not even sun hot. Cool. Like the stone under him. He was in a dimly lit room. And... Techno was crouched over him?

“Back with us?” the piglin hybrid snorted. Dream’s attention loosely fell on him as he catalogued his surroundings. The various chests. The large chair. The corner of a green covered bed. His room. In his house. Techno stood, and Dream caught sight of Phil leaning over the green covered bed. Dream scrambled to his feet.

“Get away from him,” Dream growled. Phil looked over his shoulder and now folded wings.

“I’m done,” said the Avian as he stepped away from the bed. Dream took careful steps past the toxic Avian. He didn’t give the man his back and examined Peace through the corner of his eye. The sight of the tiny piglin breathing heavily brought him up short.

The tiny skull, no head, had rough pink skin over all of it. The eye lids of both eyes matched. And no green highlighted the edges of torn skin. This was a fully piglin child. A shaky hand landed on a sweaty but only lightly warm forehead. The head snuggled into the hand, and Dream collapsed next to the bed.

“See? Everything is fine,” said Techno from over Dream’s shoulder. “Better than fine even.”

“Get out,” Dream said, not taking his eyes off of Peace. The tiny piglin breathed deep and slow. He scooted closer, blocking Peace from the other two’s sight.

“Come on, Dream. Don’t be like that—”

“Get. Out,” Dream repeated forcefully. He flipped his body to face them. Peace remained hidden behind him. “Now.”

“Look. I know what Phil did was out of line—” Techno attempted.

“Your favor was worthless,” Dream snarled. “And so is your word.”

Techno tensed, and blood eyes glowed with rage.

“Okay, that’s enough,” Techno growled. “I don’t know what happened to you, and at this point I don’t think I care. What I care about is the safety of the syndicate and stopping this server from getting overrun by red weeds and becoming some undone omelet’s empire. So I will not let you kick us out of the only safe place of the server that you were supposed to protect.”

“You don’t get a choice,” Dream said flatly. His fingers dipped into the server’s code and input a lettered command. The fingers fumbled over the numbers that followed the letters, but his brain settled on anywhere but here. Red eyes widened, and blue eyes narrowed. And then they were gone. Like they should have been from the beginning.

Dream slumped over the bed. He grunted and pushed his forehead against the now whole small one. The tiny body wiggled and moved closer, and Dream crawled into the bed to let it snuggled into him. Peace let out a squeaky sigh and sagged into Dream’s chest.

The tiny piglin remained asleep even as the chest heaved and his head grew wet and sticky. The arms around him tightened, and gasping sobs pressed near his ears. But he lay still and breathing in Dream’s arms.

## Chapter End Notes

Ender translation by NerdyTea\_05 in the comments. Thank you.

"Where have you been?"

“here.”

"you did not meet me when I revealed myself, why?"

"yes"

"is it that bad?"

“It is that bad, how did you make that mushroom stew?”

$$\Delta \wedge \Box \neq \exists U \neq \exists \Pi' \neq \psi \wedge \exists \Phi \{ \subseteq \Delta \neq \exists \wedge \sigma, "$$

"if you try to keep me from eating one, I will tell techno and Phil you're not sharing,"

"Why did you—"

# Does Misery Want Company?

## Chapter Summary

Niki and Ranboo aren't the greatest houseguests, but they aren't the worst. Problem is that Dream isn't sure he wants houseguests at all.

## Chapter Notes

Writing is hard. That is all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Where are Phil and Techno?”

The whisper woke Dream from his troubled doze. He briefly checked on the still breathing body in his arms and then peered over his shoulder. Niki stood stiff in the doorway.

“...gone,” said Dream. Brown eyes grew wide as they looked at him, and he noted the air against his face where ceramic should be. He tensed and would have slipped the mask back in place, but he couldn't let go of the tiny body in his arms. “They hurt Peace.”

“Phil did. Not Techno,” she said after a long stretch of silence. She moved closer to the bed but hesitated and pulled out a crafting table from her inventory. Settling the crude table near the door, she sat down. “Did you send them to the Egg?”

He shook his head. He had sent them somewhere (where was it exactly?) but not near the Egg's base. Or where it should be. He was fairly certain. He had only wanted them gone.

“Could you bring Techno back?” she asked in a soft, cracking voice. He shook his head again. Tucking the blankets around the sleeping baby piglin (full piglin, not zombie), he sat

up. Adjusting the cloak around his shoulder to fully hide Peace from view, he slipped the mask back on.

“Would he want to come back without Phil?”

Niki’s whole body slumped, energy drained and hope crushed. Dream tilted his head and stared through his mask. Her fingers clenched into fists and then opened to let her head fall into them.

“I’ll protect you,” Dream whispered. He knew it wasn’t what she wanted to hear.

“Until when? We make you angry? We cross some rule we didn’t know was there? Or are you waiting for a better time to make a deal with the Egg for your own safety?” she growled, her head snapping up as if to bite him. Her gaze met the mask and faltered. But her words didn’t. “I would rather you get it over with now. Because I might not have poisoned you this time, but I might next time.”

“...you won’t poison me,” Dream said firmly. “You’d find another way to kill me.”

Niki flinched, and her head lifted up further to widen her stare.

“Don’t hurt Peace, don’t hurt me, and you can stay,” said Dream. There were only two rules this time. Surely they could follow two easy ones. He wouldn’t even stand in the way if they tried to hurt each other. “Those are the only rules.”

“What about destroying your fields or burning down your house?”

“That would be stupid,” Dream said with a sigh. He’d see about fireproofing the house after reviewing and experimenting with the server coding. “But I won’t kick you out.”

“And if I poison you?”

“You’ll get kicked out,” Dream said blankly. “Though you’re more likely to attack me with a hoe.”

“You’re probably right,” she replied. Her shoulders had lost some of the hunch. “Ranboo?”

“Same thing. Though Ender won’t.”

“Okay. Okay. We’ll stick to your rules then.” She stood, reclaimed the crafting table, and turned towards the door. She hesitated and then moved closer to the bed. Her head craned, but Dream leaned slightly in whatever direction she turned. She stopped two blocks in front of him. “Is he okay?”

“He will be.”

Niki’s lips pressed together, and her cheek twitched.

“Can I see him?”

“...why.”

“What did Phil do to him? He wasn’t...your little one wasn’t meant to be part of...the plan.”

Dream stared, and Niki fidgeted. He then shifted a little. Manufactured light fell across Peace’s sleeping face. Niki’s face sagged and softened. Her brown eyes glinted sharply.

“Wasn’t he a zombie piglin?”

“He was.”

“Huh,” she huffed. “Isn’t dezombification a good thing?”

“Not always,” Dream whispered. “Not the way Phil did it.”

“Okay,” she said, and the brown eyes darkened. She gave a sharp nod. “Okay.”

And then she left. Dream stared at the open door. Against his protesting muscles, he stood and placed barrier blocks in the doorway. He turned back to the bed. Only soft snuffling sounded.

He sat on the bed’s edge and pulled a book out from a tear of the code. The book bore numbers strung around the ancient cover. Pressing a finger onto the numbers, they split and scattered. An unnatural wind blew the book open, and Dream rolled his eyes at the dramatics.

Glowing numbers swirled in the pages, and Dream fingered the code and straightened them. The server was being difficult again, but hopefully with Ender’s help it would settle and work with him.

---

Slipping into the library, Dream eyed the tall figure in the darkened corner. Red and green eyes flittered his way and flinched away. Dream sighed and began to back away.

“Wait!” Ranboo cried. Dream stopped, gripping the straps of his basket tightly. The tall figure slunk closer but didn’t get closer than five blocks. He fiddled with his coat sleeves.

A few seconds of silence passed. And then several more. Perhaps the boy’s sleeves would be fiddled all the way off and Dream could exit the room. But the sleeves stayed on despite the constant pulling. So Dream would have to do something.



“...do you need something?” Dream asked instead of pulling out Nightmare and hacking the sleeves off. The hands stopped, but the red and green eyes focused on the wall to Dream’s left.

“Um...yes...?” The enderman hybrid stuttered. He hunched and then semi-straightened. “...why?”

“Why what?”

“Why am I still here?” Ranboo spat before recoiling. His shoulders knocked against his ears. “I should be with Phil and Techno.”

“You should be,” Dream agreed. The boy flinched again. “But Ender did nothing wrong.”

“Ender?” asked Ranboo as his shoulders lowered. “How do you know...?”

“Do you really want that answered?” Dream whispered. Ranboo didn’t nod, but he didn’t move. Good enough. “He was sent for me.”

“What?” Ranboo squeaked.

“He’s an enderman,” said Dream, and he backed away from Ranboo. “He’s from the End.”

“But...what about me?” asked Ranboo, not stopping Dream’s movement.

“That’s your problem,” said Dream. He was fully on the other side of the doorway. “Threaten me or Peace again, and you’re gone.”

The green and red eyes stop on Dream's mask, but Dream doesn't let their weight fall on him long. He hurried away.

---

As he headed down to the fields, a figure came into view. Her pink hair looked strange in the morning mist, a dark swirl of light grey more than dawn pink. It contrasted with the actual dawn pink on the horizon. Shadows attempted to hide her face, but they underlined the nervous lines and chewed-on lips instead.

"Good morning," Niki said with a smile too wide and cheerful. Her fingers tightened around the hoe in her hand. "I thought you might want some help again. Especially since I haven't seen your normal helper anywhere in the last few days."

Dream purposefully didn't shrug or bring any attention to the basket on his back.

"Soooo," she said, stretching the word and her smile. "Can I help?"

"...you want more wheat, don't you?"

The smile slipped, and brown eyes narrowed over their dark bags.

"Yes...?"

"Okay," Dream replied. He gave her half a stack of carrot seeds. Confusion replaced nervousness, but he merely passed her and set about harvesting the wheat from yesterday. Her stare feels heavy on his back, but soon it slips and disappears. He looks over to see the pink-haired woman breaking a new row in an old field with her hoe.

The two work no nearer than a field apart until lunch, and then Niki puts her hoe away and determinedly moved closer to Dream. Dream put his own hoe away and watched her

approach. She stopped four blocks away from Dream and held something out. He did not flinch back.

“It’s lunchtime, so now’s a good a time as any to take a break,” she said. Dream noted the object in her hand as a sandwich. “This one is for you.”

Humming a soft affirmative, Dream took the sandwich. Niki pulled out another from her inventory and plopped down on the unbroken ground to eat it. Moving off the turned over soil, he dared to move two blocks over and also sat down. She didn’t look at him, didn’t turn her gaze away from the direction of the house where Ranboo was likely hiding.

He took a bite of the sandwich. There is a pause, and he can’t help but give a low hum of pleasure. This was definitely oven-baked bread, and he didn’t know steak could have more than pure meat flavor. He takes the next bite a little slower.

“So where’s Peace?” she asked, words stilted but at least she wasn’t smiling.

“Safe,” he said after swallowing his second bite. He took another.

“You know it isn’t good for children to be locked away, even for their safety. They need the sun and socialization.”

His legs locked, and his shoulders tensed to stiffen but he smooth them out. The scent of hot obsidian and molten earth hit his nose briefly. He intentionally focused on chewing and savoring the warm, fluffy texture of baked bread and the chewy taste of spices in steak.

“Everyone needs that,” he said plainly. “I wouldn’t keep that from anyone, let alone my—” He choked and coughed on the little food that fell into his throat. Dream kept himself from convulsing over the food (or the word he’d almost said). He calmed his body as quickly as he could and tried again. “I have him with me now.”

Niki remained silent, and the weighty stare returned. But then she turned back to her sandwich.

“Then why don’t you let him out of the basket? You know I won’t hurt him.”

His shoulders and arms briefly curled around the straps of the basket. But he forced them to uncurl and tilted his mask in Niki’s direction instead. Her fingers fiddled with the bitten edges of her bread.

“Ranboo won’t either. He doesn’t like hurting innocent people.”

“...and who determines who is innocent?”

Niki jerked and turned to Dream, and Dream stood. He set the basket on the ground and gently pulled a tiny limp body out of it. He cradled it as he sat back down on the grass. The weight of the stare crushed against his lungs, and he adjusted his hold to hide Peace in the crux of his arms but allow him to get sun. Soft, shuffling breaths lightly push against his shirt.

Scrambling sounded next to him, and then Niki closed the full distance between them. She stuck her head above his shoulder and examined the tiny piglin. Curses hiss almost inaudibly under her breath, and a hand fell down towards Peace’s head. Dream jerked away from her, and the hand stopped. It hovered before pulling back to Niki’s side.

“What’s wrong with him?” she asked voice low, as if not to wake the tiny piglin. But she was smarter than she often let on. She knew he wouldn’t wake even if she yelled.

“The change was hard. Too hard. He’s in—he’s in a coma.”

“Oh,” she gasped. She placed herself next to him. “Is it safe to carry him around like that?”

“Safer than the alternative,” he said, voice hard. His grip tightened.

“It is good for him to get some sun,” she said, still soft. “But we could set him up next to a window. Maybe in the library? You’ve been spending a lot of time there, so you can keep an eye on him. I can take care of the fields for now, and if you have to go out for any reason, I can watch him. I’ll keep my comm handy, and if there is any sign that anything is wrong, I can message you.”

His mask faced her, but she didn’t turn away.

“It’s...not ideal. But I won’t hurt him. And I won’t let anyone hurt him either. Not on my life—not on my code.”

Brown eyes remained on his mask. Fingers pressed against the ground and fiddled with the grass, but otherwise Niki stayed. His own hand raised and tapped where the smile was on his mask, and then his head slowly tilted forward and then back.

“If anything happens to him, I will deliver you to the Egg myself.”

“Got it,” she said nodding firmly. Her hands clutched the grass. “Can I ask one more question?”

Dream tilted his head again.

“Could you bring Techno back?”

He stilled.

“I understand Phil, I do. When Sapnap killed Fungi—well, you saw what happened,” Niki said quietly with her gaze on the ground. She peeked at him from the corner of her eye and quickly clarified, “I’m not saying Peace is your pet. I can see he means more to you than that.”

What I'm saying is that if I was that upset about Fungi, you must have been even more upset about Phil hurting Peace. But there's no reason Techno has to go down with him. He...he was doing his best to protect you and Peace from Phil. I know he won't want to come without Phil, but you don't have to give him a choice, do you? You're the Admin. You could just... bring him here."

A sigh pushed out his throat, and he shook his head.

"Would he stay here without Phil?"

She bit her lip and turned fully away from him.

"We could ask. Bring him here for a moment. At least give us a chance to talk him into it."

"...do you think that will actually work?"

"Maybe," she burst. Her teeth bared in his directions, but she instantly put a hand to her forehead and breathed deep. "We...I have to try. I can't leave him out there with the Egg."

"If anyone can handle themselves against it, he can," Dream assured. It was the truth.

"Yes, but..." Niki stood and stared past the fields and to tangle of red vines that pushed against the invisible barrier blocks. "It's bad out there. Even for him."

Dream watched the vines. Their pushes and pokes kept a steady pressure on his barrier. He stood and headed towards the house, his back to the angry, red press.

"I can't," he said. "He won't stay without Phil. It's too much of a risk."

“Trying can’t hurt! You can bring him here and send him back again with barely any effort. If you don’t, it’s because you don’t want to. You don’t want to face him and the fate you abandoned him and Phil to.”

Dream grabbed his basket and kept walking. The growing screams struck his ear and back.

“He’s ten times better than you, and you know it! You’re too scared to bring him back! You lost to him. You’re weaker, and so you’ve been looking for a reason to toss him out since we go here! This isn’t about Phil at all. This is about your own ego! You can’t stand being weaker than anyone. Except apparently the Egg! It takes over your server and you don’t give a s—. Phil was right! You don’t deserve to be the Admin!”

The last word broke wet and loud. A sharp intake of breath lead into a muffled groaning sob. Dream did not turn and see the pink-haired woman collapsing onto her knees. Didn’t see tears run down her face and onto her grey pants. Didn’t see the woman press her wet face into her propped up knees. He entered his house and walked up to his bedroom instead.

---

The numbers blurred and darkened, and Dream bit the inside of his lip to keep his eyelids from falling fully closed. He put his hand on the page and fiddled with the data, but the code remained too complex to upload even if he were to risk his personal code. He set the book aside and leaned back against the bed. His head bumped against the edge of the frame, and he grimaced. Outside the open window was darkness and stars. He might have once considered it a risk, but the newest barrier blocks sat between the panes and the rest of the room invisibly.

He reached into the server code and fiddled with the half-issued command stored there. His fingers traced over the two names and held still at the part where the numbers went. He had considered various locations, possibilities. The silence the numbers would bring. The ease with which he could walk around his own house and fields. The lack of barrier blocks within an already large sphere of barrier blocks. Full safety brought on by a row of numbered coordinates.

The head outside the barrier had likely broken down and become part of the server’s code. Any day the Egg or Bad would show up with two more people added to the Eggpire’s

collection. And he would be done with deals. He could be done now.

He settled the first number into place, summoned it to become part of the command. Techno's old house. The one where he'd holed himself up when he retired. The one where he'd hidden Tommy from Dream. Where he'd likely been the whole time Dream had died over and over in a dark hot box.

He dismissed the number and summoned another. The location of a blood and tear-stained black box. It wasn't supposed to exist, not without his commission. Not without him paying Sam to construct something more horrid than Dream's own imagination could conjure. But then Sam could have easily decided to create it himself simply for the joy of building an inescapable prison to put all the evils in the world in. Might have been Sam's true plan all along.

The number flipped to another. He couldn't take the chance. It was too much. He wanted them gone, but they were neither Quackity or Sam. Niki's bakery would be better. Some place familiar, where maybe they stood a chance. Where they could make their own safety since the Egg would not likely look for them where it already had before.

A knock tapped against the door, and Dream closed the code. He'd get back to it later.

"...who is it?"

"᠙᠔᠕᠕ ᠊ ᠙᠔᠐᠓᠑ ᠊᠕?" came a screech. Dream pushed himself upright.

"᠑᠕᠓᠑᠕?" He stood and walked to the entrance. His hand pressed against a barrier block before the door. He pushed but didn't remove the block. "᠕᠑᠕᠕᠕ ᠓᠐ ᠑᠕᠕ ᠕᠕᠕᠕᠕?"

"᠕᠐ ᠕᠕᠕᠕᠕," the enderman hybrid screeched.

"Okay then," Dream continued in Ender. "Talk."



*“Why are you hiding? Why have you let this blight come onto our land?”*

His fingers twitched. The barrier block disappeared, and then the ones near it did too. He opened the door. The tall figure loomed over him. The red and green gaze pinned themselves on his mask.

*“It was inevitable. No matter what I would have done, I could not have stopped it.”*

-

*“How could you know that? There is no record by any of us that you made any effort to stop it.”*

*“The best way to stop it would have been to unite the remaining server residents against it,”* hissed Dream. *“But after L’Manberg, that became an impossibility.”*

*“You failed to try.”*

-

*“This time I knew trying was futile. These server residents would never be able to stand together against an enemy that wasn’t set up to fail.”*

-

*“Then you should have made them forcibly to do your bidding.”*

-

*“That wouldn’t work out,”* hissed Dream. *“And I refuse to try again.”*

*“What about those you let into your safety, your protection?”* Ender screeched. *“And those two of us who remain.”*

-

*“Stupidity. A moment of weakness caused by lunacy. I should never have allowed it.”*

-

*“You should have allowed me to perish?”*

Dream's mask tilted down as if to slip out from under the accusing stare. His own fell on the floor.

*“What do you want, Ender?”*

**“To understand,”** the looming figure hissed. A hand lifted in the corner of Dream’s eye, and the Admin watched as it slowly came to perch on Dream’s shoulder. **“You are hurt. Mother wishes to understand your hurt.”**

*“She doesn’t need to. I have alerts set in every stronghold, and the Egg cannot catch enough of your brethren to open the portals. Her territory is safe.”*

*“You are our Admin,”* Ender screeched, and Dream flinched. *“We refuse to let you fall to the blight.”*

“I won’t,” he whispered in Human. The effort to screech had scraped his throat, and he had felt the room’s temperature rise. He swallowed to mellow the ache. “I have been studying the code. The Egg will not break through the barrier even if it gains Phil.”

[illegible]

“...some mistakes cannot be unmade.” The hissing sigh escaped him. He tapped his mask, and let the words continue. “They should never have been allowed to enter the server.”

“ $\Delta \sqsubseteq \mathbf{O}$ ?”

“All of them.”

He left the door open as he flopped back onto the bed and curled around the unmoving baby piglin. Ender gave a frustrated hiss and entered. Dream could barely make out the enderman hybrid as he sat and leaned against the now closed door. Nudging his mask onto the side of his head, he pressed his forehead against the much smaller one and wondered what the server would have been like with only mobs as residents.

---

Niki dropped the pie into Dream’s lap. Dream tore away from the book he had been deciphering, numbers superimposed on the crust now under his nose.

“You need to eat more,” she said flatly. She then sat next to him on the edge of the bed. “Also the wheat is almost ready to be harvested again. And in case you couldn’t tell by the pie, the pumpkins already have been.”

“...thank you,” Dream said. He picked up the small pie and nibbled at the edges of the crust. As usual, the taste was extraordinary.

“So...do you need to go anywhere? Because I am ready to take over babysitting duties if you do.”

Dream narrowed his eyes, and she snorted.

“No. I’m not planning anything. And as I mentioned before, you scared Ranboo straight. Plus Ender would likely stop him before he did anything. I swear they’ve found some weird way of communicating.”

“...I would like to visit the piglin colony I used to frequent,” he said slowly, examining her every movement. “For supplies and information.”

“Thanks for letting me know,” Niki said with a stretched smile. “And I should start preparing for a hasty move in case you fail to return by what time?”

“I plan to be back for dinner.”

“You know that would leave Ranboo in charge of making it. Are you sure you want to eat Ranboo’s cooking?”

“He’s gotten better since you started teaching him.”

“He’s better than you, if nothing else,” she snipped. She gave him an unsubtle examination after the remark, but he didn’t even shrug. It was the truth.

“If anything happens, alert me on the comms,” he said as he stored his book and stood. Niki raised her primed comm in the air.

“As agreed,” she confirmed. He nodded and slipped out of the room. His hands found the inside of his cloak and clutched the material. He managed to not look back.

He passed the tall enderman hybrid on the way down the stairs, and red and green eyes skittered immediately away from him. Slipping his mask back onto his face, he brushed past the fidgeting hybrid.

“I’ll be back by dinner,” he said simply and disappeared into the basement. Rebuilding the portal took no time at all even with the added security features, and he soon stepped into the purple swirling surface. Red surrounded the portal. Vines crisscrossed and dug into every available surface. The piglin colony was nowhere to be found.

Dream stepped back into the portal, but a vine wrapped itself around his wrist. His fingers flapped down onto it, and the spiky code bit at their tips. Another vine twisted and grew onto

his ankle. He found the breaks in the Egg's defenses he'd used before, and the vine around his wrist ceased to be. So did the one around his ankle and his calf and his waist. The remaining vines stilled and flopped onto the ground.

"There you are!" came an all too chipper voice. The vines split in the middle and Tommy's body rose from the floor. "We've been waiting for you to appear. Ready to give up the two in your little bubble? Don't know what you were thinking trying to keep them. No one likes you."

The blue eyes were open too wide as was the teen's mouth. Stark red veins replaced duller pink in the white of the boy's eyes, and his voice pitched oddly. Bile pushed up Dream's throat, and he stepped back into the portal. A sudden shove pushed him forward and out of the purple swirls.

"Interesting," said the thing that was Tommy. The red-shot eyes didn't narrow, but the vines around Dream prodded the portal. "I can't use this portal. That's some interesting coding you've done, Admin."

"I have nothing for you," Dream said stiffly.

"Not much left that I don't have," the thing that was Tommy chuckled and giggled. Like it didn't know how to do either. "But that was the agreement, wasn't it?"

Dream's shoulders flinched into his neck, but he didn't reply. He focused on breaking the vines that neared him from existence. The thing that was Tommy flopped its head to the side in a mockery of one of Dream's own head tilts.

"The whole server," the thing that was Tommy hissed in a failed attempt at a whisper. "And everyone on it but yourself. And a small piece of land where you could remain undisturbed. Yet you hold back two residents that are no doubt disturbing your peace. No doubt. You already threw the other two out. They are great additions to the Eggpire already and so they won't bother you. No need to worry about that."

His stomach churned, but he forced it to remain condensed into his center. He could not react.

“But why only half when you can have all of them gone? You haven’t forgotten, have you? What they did. What became of you when you tried to protect?” the thing that was Tommy squealed in place of screaming. A green figure turned a nearby corner and stood by the mockery of a teen boy. His blotched green face and hollow black eyes caused Dream’s lungs to seize. “He isn’t as practiced, and he certainly isn’t the preferred one for the job. But he could be a good reminder nonetheless.”

Dream’s world blurred, and his chest burned. Dark smudges created blind spots, and Dream’s concentration slipped. Vines wrapped around his arms and legs. His mind held no control of his body as his limbs flailed erratically against the vines, and his voice hitched with barely audible whimpers.

“Calm down, Admin. If I meant you harm, it would have already been done. I simply want to give you a reminder,” the thing that was Tommy said too low pitched to be calming. His body’s struggles increased, even as his mind grew limp. And then shining shears glinted in Sam’s hands.

His head and body pounding, Dream slipped into the code and erased part of the half-saved command. Faster than he’d ever processed, his own name was placed followed by numbers he’d already carved into his soul. The vines, the glint, the wide, wide grin disappeared. He sat on his bed.

“Dream? What? What happ—” The voice started and continued even as Dream’s hearing failed. His body curled and flipped onto his side, and his arms grabbed onto the baby piglin unconscious on the bed. Phantom limbs squeezed around his forearms and calves. They were quickly erased by sharp blades slicing into the skin of his forearm and tearing their way up his arm.

A snap, a laugh, and then his other arm burned throbbed howled in pain. Silence did not seal the blood in his throat, and whimpers, please, whines gained reprieves. So he let them as the twin blades pressed into both the front and back of his lower torso. Hissing (“can an Admin survive disembowelment”) and then a slicing, pressing squeeze that released the scream from his throat and the tears and blood from his eyes.

A new pressure settled on his shoulder. His body moved to push it away, but he quickly regained control of himself. He slumped and allowed the pressure to press whatever it wanted. Struggling made it worse. Not struggling meant less pain. Less pain. Anything for less pain.

“—re okay. You’re here. Peace is here. Peace is okay. Everyone is okay. You’re okay. You’re here. Peace is okay. Peace is here. Everyone is okay,” a panicked voiced faded in to Dream’s ear. The pressure on his shoulder went up and down, and he opened his eyes. He couldn’t process anything he saw. Everything was too light, too cool, to colorful. “You’re here. You’re okay. Peace is here. Peace is okay. Everyone is okay. You’re okay. You’re here. Peace is here. Peace is okay. Everyone is okay—”

“What happened?” hissed a second voice, and he realized the first voice was neither Quackity’s or Sam’s. And the second one wasn’t either. “Why...? What would make Dream...?”

“Sssh,” shushed the first voice. The pressure stopped moving. “Stop panicking. You’re not helping.”

“Sorry,” the second voice whispered. The pressure resumed going up and down and around in circles. He felt a tiny snort vibrated near his chest and saw a tiny pink mob pressed into his chest. His own hands gripped the tiny body tightly, knuckles paper white. Past it was a green bedspread, and then a room beyond that. No obsidian or pouring lava. Taking a deep and near painless breath, he peered over his shoulder. A small smile curled under warm brown eyes as they noticed the movement.

“Dream? You back with us?” the pink-haired woman said. The pressure on his shoulder disappeared as her hand pulled away from him. Briefly his body leaned to follow the hand, but he quickly brought it under control.

“Are you okay?” came the hesitant question from the tall figure behind the woman. Red and green eyes flickered across his body. “Those were...some loud screams.”

Screams...? Wait. He sat up and did his best to ignore the other two’s careful watching. Dream slipped into the server’s code and found the completed command untampered. He

slipped some more alarms into the code and then refocused on the two in front of him. They hadn't moved.

"We can't leave the sphere."

"Not even you?" asked Niki.

"Not for now," Dream said softly around the edges of pain that his screams had caused. But no fire-ice-pulse-like pain throbbed through his arms and gut, so it was easily ignored. "The Egg wants you."

"Why? Why does it want us? What does it want with the server?"

Dream started to answer but stopped.

"I don't know," he finally said.

"Maybe we should find out?" asked Ranboo cautiously.

Dream nodded. He pushed himself onto his legs and nearly collapsed onto the floor. A hand grabbed his elbow and kept him from falling flat on the floor. Another steadied him. They both moved once he regained his balance.

"Maybe you should rest first?" Niki suggested. She held herself tight as if keeping herself from regrabbing his arm.

"You did almost fall over," Ranboo said softly as he fidgeted. His hands remained fidgeting in front of him, ready to help steady him again.



Dream rotated his head back and forth between the two. The echoes of pain trembled through his arms and stomach, and he plopped back onto the bed.

“Okay,” Dream agreed, slipping his hand across the bedspread and next to the lump in the middle. “Could you bring me some books from the library?”

“Sure. Which ones?” asked Niki. He focused on the hard surface scrapping his face. Pulling out a notebook from his inventory, he handed it to her.

“The ones with the numbers that match those on the last page.”

“Got it. Ranboo, stay here with him.”

The enderman hybrid shook, but Niki left before he could protest. He stared at Dream a second and then flickered to the lump on the bed. Dream stiffened and moved in between the two. Red and green eyes focused on him, and the boy nodded. He took a few steps back and settled by the window.

Dream shifted and stretched his legs on the bed, his knee bumping into the lump. He placed his hand fully on the bump and felt the tiny form's code. It was still pulsing and unsettled. Hopefully it would take longer to settle. Long enough so that he can figure out what to do about the red all over his server.

## Chapter End Notes

Ender Translation:

“Ω△∧ ∩ Ω○∩ψ ∩∧?” - “Can i come in?”

“ $\psi \wedge [\ ] \psi \vee ?$ ” - “Ender?”

" $\Delta \sqsubseteq \triangle \overline{\Phi} \not\vdash \square \neg \triangle \triangle \wedge \overline{\Phi}$ ?" - "What do you want?"

“ $\overline{\Phi} \circ \overline{\Phi} \triangle U \circ$ ,” - “To talk,”

“If? You have great faith in the blood warrior. But then so does my other self,”

“But you must remember. You were entrusted with this land. You must answer for its care.”

“Who?” - "Who?"

# What Matters

## Chapter Summary

Dream gives some free lessons and manages to mess with the Egg. Too bad it messes with him back.

## Chapter Notes

Warning: The Egg is creepy. That is all.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Knocking against the barrier block, it pulsed and glowed. Dream tapped the one next to the first and caused it to glow as well, numbers circling and pulsing around it. The one under it soon glowed as well. He tapped the one next to the last forming a glowing four-block square.

“What are you doing?”

Dream looked down from his five block high tower to the red and green eyes below.

“...experimenting.”

“It looks like your smile,” Ranboo said as he fidgeted with his sleeves. The glowing blocks under the square did curve into a crude smile, but Dream hadn’t tapped the other “eye” into place yet. “Are you trying to provoke it?”

“Making sure it remembers that this area is mine,” Dream said, as if that was all there was to it.

“Oh,” Ranboo sighed. Dream jumped off his tower, landed on a boat, and instinctively stored the boat back in his inventory. Red and green eyes widened. “How’d you do that?”

Blinking, Dream looked at Ranboo. His mask unnerved the boy, but Ranboo asked again if a little more quietly.

“With the boat. How’d you do that with the boat?”

Dream hummed. It wasn’t that impressive. He had done much more complicated maneuvers during his Manhunts. Hadn’t he seen...Oh, this Ranboo hadn’t.

“It’s not that difficult,” Dream explained. He handed Ranboo one of his spare boats. The boy took it and flickered between the boat and Dream. “When you fall, all you have to do is place it the moment before you hit the ground, and it will nullify all the momentum. That way you can land safely.”

“Really?” Ranboo said, staring at the boat in wonder. Dream remembered the first time he had managed the trick. The hunters had gotten so ma—He bit the corner of his lips. Red and green eyes staring at his mask settled him back in the present. They slipped away but then came back. “Can you...maybe...teach me?”

Teach him? Should he...? It could be useful...in more than one way.

“Okay,” he agreed. Ranboo blinked as Dream drew out a bucket and handed it to him. “But let’s start with something a little easier.”

“Easier?” Ranboo echoed, turning the bucket over in his hands. “It’s easier to land on a bucket?”

“No,” Dream said as his lips twitched. “Let’s fill that up with water from the pond and I’ll show you.”

“Okay...?”

---

A plate landed on his lap, and Dream startled away from his book. Niki stood in front of him with a small frown.

“Here. Dinner,” she said.

“...thank you?” Dream replied. He stored the book in his inventory and moved to eat the steak and carrots.

“You’re welcome,” she replied distractedly. Keeping an eye on the woman staring at him, he munched on the carrots. He vaguely considered placing the enchanting table in the kitchen. He was vaguely curious what Niki would make with it. “Do you know why Ranboo keeps leaping off high block towers and attempting to land in boats?”

A piece of carrot was nearly squeezed in his tightening throat. He chewed slowly and carefully swallowed before answering.

“Maybe...?”

“Maybe?” she repeated. Brown eyes glared hard at his mask. “What does maybe mean?”

“I might have taught him that boats nullify the momentum of a fall.”

“Boats do what?” Niki snapped, and Dream held firm. But her expression seemed more shocked than anything else. “That can’t be true.”

“It is,” Dream said. “I use boats to break my fall all the time.”

“Really?” she said, brown eyes narrowed and peering. “I’ve heard of the water bucket trick. I saw Ranboo using that earlier. But a boat? Yeah, I have a hard time believing that one. All it seems to be doing to Ranboo is giving him major bruising. If he keeps going he might even break a leg.”

“He won’t. I told him not to practice without a gapple or a regen potion.”

“You did?” she muttered. He sighed, finished the carrots and steak, and moved towards the window. Removing the barrier blocks, he opened it and leapt. A hurried gasp sounded behind him, but he pulled his boat out and landed harmlessly on the ground. The brown eyes stared down at him so widely he could make out their whites from ground level.

Placing several grass blocks under him, he made a tower high enough to reach the window. He waved his hand in a flicking motion, and Niki stepped away from the window. He leapt and landed in the bedroom. With a practiced motion, he replaced the barrier blocks.

“How’d you do that?” came the question filled with a good amount of awe. Had none of these ever seen him in action? The Manhunts had been public, hadn’t they?

“Practice,” he said. The brown eyes narrowed again, but determination replaced suspicion.

“Show me.”

“Who would watch Peace?”

“Ranboo. Or Ender if you prefer. Both would do a good job.”

The last words came with a hard edge, one that dared Dream to argue. He didn’t. Arguing never helped.

“Let’s ask Ender,” Dream said. He traced the inside of his cloak with the side of his hand and then asked, “Do you know how to MLG with the water bucket?”

“No,” Niki admitted. She gave an awkward smile. “Guess that comes first?”

Dream nodded. He took a deep breath. This skill was harmless. This skill could not be used against him.

“We’ll start tomorrow.”

---

The code burned his fingers, but he pressed harder and smoothed the swirling numbers. He’d waited. He’d waited too long. He had to do this now. It wasn’t settling on its own. The numbers stung his own code, but he ignored it. It was just pain. He would be fine.

The writhing numbered mass smoothed and gelled into a more stable state. He ran his fingers over the last section he’d straightened and then pulled away. His whole body collapsed heavily onto the bed under him. A loud snort came from a startled but fully awake throat. Small hands poked at him, his hair, his mask. A solid head bumped against his ceramic mask, and Dream sent a message to his arms to move. They ignored him.

Another bump hit the mask, and Dream opened his mouth slightly. But his throat refused to let out anything but a groan. The tiny hands pressed against both sides of his head, and a harder bump cracked the ceramic. Dream groaned urgently, trying to stop the bumps before the code, the child, harmed himself further.

A frustrated grunt snorted. And then a loud squeal pierced through the room. Its loud note held long. It lowered and muffled into a smaller squeal as bleary noises came from the door. Dream grimaced and tried again to get his arms to respond.

Long arms lifted him and shifted him to fully lay on the bed on his back. He almost managed a grunt, because how—

“ $\overline{\Phi} \Xi \Psi \triangle \nabla \mathbb{U} \mathbb{U} \boxplus \ominus \Psi \{ \wedge \ominus \overline{\Phi} \Xi \nabla \otimes \Psi \overline{\Phi} \Xi \Psi \frac{1}{2} \nabla \times \times \mathbb{I} \Psi \times,$ ” answered a hiss. “I  
 $\overline{\Phi} \Psi \mathbb{U} \Psi \neq \ominus \times \overline{\Phi} \Psi \boxplus \overline{\Phi} \Xi \neq \ominus \Pi \sigma \Xi \overline{\Phi} \Xi \Psi \mathfrak{h}.$ ”

Huh. He would need to remedy that.

“Can you let me in?” cried a muffled voice. Dream could almost make out pink hair from this position.

“ $\wedge \ominus. \ominus \wedge \mathbb{U} \nabla \overline{\Phi} \Xi \Psi \nabla \boxplus \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \wedge.$ ”

“Seriously?” she growled. A few curses hissed out, and he wished his body would cease to be lead so that he could tilt his mask and have it glare at her. “You need to have a way for us to bypass these so that we can help you in these kind of situations, idiot.”

Dream could snort and did. He wasn’t doing that.

A small squeal caught Ender’s attention, and tiny hard-tipped hands dug into his forearm. The tall enderman hybrid patted the tiny head and picked the baby piglin up to place it nearer Dream’s head. Its hands moved to Dream’s head and hesitated.

“ $\mathfrak{h} \nabla \nabla \mathfrak{I}?$ ”

Dream gave a tiny hiss that could have been interpreted various ways, but Ender understood its actual message. White and black hands removed the mask, and a tiny forehead instantly pushed against the side of his. Wrestling all his power, he gave a small press back. Peace sagged and settled into his side.





barrier. Techno pressed his back against the invisible blocks, exposing it fully to Dream, and gave another loud squeal.

A gurgle cut off the squeal as a vine managed to wrap Techno's throat in its grasp. Another pulled the limp body of Phil by its throat out of Techno's hold. Techno swung the sword in his free hand wide and in a directionless jerk, and the sharp edge dug into the vine dragging Phil. It went limp around Phil's throat as another tugged onto his arm, another onto his thigh and one around the broken wing. A snap cracked as the newest vines pulled.

A half-gurgled squeal intermittently came from Techno as he let go of the sword to grip onto Phil's body with both hands. But the motion jostled his loosened hold and caused Phil's body to fall onto the awaiting vines. They instantly surrounded him. Vines twisted around Techno as he lunged to the lump where Phil's body had fallen. He struggled and snapped vines with his own hands. But he couldn't reach Phil. Techno let out a broken, gurgled squeal.

Dream slipped into the code, input the names and function, and ran the command. A heaving piglin hybrid collapsed onto his knees beside Dream, and a limp Avian splayed onto the grass a few centimeters from the barrier. A tiny piglin latched onto Techno's arm and squealed highly. Between gasps, Techno took note of Peace with a grimace.

Giving a loud grunt, Dream grabbed Peace and yanked him away from the recovering warrior. He let out a few quieter squeaks and then placed Peace back in the basket. Or he tried. The basket now bore a torn hole instead of a bottom.

Dream sighed and resigned himself to holding Peace in his arms and taking several steps back from the piglin hybrid. Blood red eyes flitted from Dream's mask to the tiny piglin in his arms, and Dream slumped and let the cloak around his shoulders obscure Peace the best it could.

"This wasn't our agreement."

His head whipped to the other side of the barrier. The thing that was Tommy pressed it face against the barrier block nearest Dream's head. Its mouth frowned, but the blue eyes remained wide and glinting.

“...they are on my land,” Dream said. He stilled and did not tighten his arms.

“But they left,” the thing that was Tommy gasped a half second too long. It continued to lengthily gasp words as its stolen hands stroked the invisible barrier. “They left, so they are mine.”

“They came back.”

“But they lost their chance, didn’t they? You sent them out yourself,” the thing that was Tommy sobbed in a giggle. A hand fisted and shoved into its mouth, muffling the next question. “Why are you taking them back?”

“What do you want?” Dream asked.

“Them,” the thing that was Tommy gurgled. It cleared its throat and continued. The hand left its mouth and met the other, pressing together and pushing against the barrier knuckle-first. “Unless you want to come out. Trade your code for theirs? Your code is that only thing left that you have that I value. I could do so much more with an Admin’s code than with this one.”

Bile burned in the back of his throat, and his head shook back and forth without thought.

“Then give them back,” said the thing that was Tommy as vines slammed against the barrier blocks from every direction. Dream activated the hidden command. The lunging vines broke and crumbled instantly into unusable code. The thing that was Tommy gurgled a scream and stumbled back. It then gave a blank, “What?”

“I’ve updated my security,” Dream said calmly. The server itself hummed beneath him as the vines nearby slowly became integrated into the server’s natural code. “What do you think?”

The thing that was Tommy stared at its now bloody hands even as blood dripped down its forehead and over its eyes. It keened suddenly but then abruptly stopped. Blood stained teeth

mocked into a wide grin. It flicked its hands, and the blood evaporated. Exposed muscle remained around the exposed knuckle bones, and the front of its skull gleamed white in between red edged tone flesh. Blood remained dripping between white teeth.

“Are you going back on your word, Admin?”

“I only wanted to remind you who is this server’s Admin,” Dream stated flatly.

“The whole server save a sphere of influence 300 blocks in diameter. Have you forgotten that? Or am I the only one that *remembers*?”

“...you were to leave me alone.”

“And you were not to involve yourself with any of the others on the server,” the thing that was Tommy said with a strained high-pitch. It cleared its throat again. “You said I could have everyone else.”

“...why does it matter? Why do you need everyone else?”

“Because I want them,” said the thing that was Tommy too brightly. Its red splattered teeth were further exposed under twitching eyes. “They’re fun. It’s fun to twist things. To make them something that I want them to be and make them think they want it too. Because it’s fun to find out what they can be. What I can be.”

It half-giggled, half-gasped.

“And it has been fun. But this code is clunky. I can’t make it react like they do yet, but I’ll get there. I have so much time. I have even more because of you. But we had a deal. Your freedom for more time. If you like, you can go back.”

A brown haired figure sat up from where it lay on the snow that had once been covered by red vines. No red vines remained in the area near the barrier, allowing Dream a good view of the purple hoodie with the green swirl on the front. Light brown eyes glowed with red.

“You did break the deal,” the thing that was Tommy scoffed and sang. It cleared its throat and motioned Karl forward. “Tell my alternate self to not offer Dream the deal.”

“Who’s Dream?” Karl muttered, blinking rapidly.

“Him,” the thing that was Tommy pointed.

“Okay,” Karl said. The swirl spun, and a green vortex obscured the time traveler. And then he reappeared. “I did it.”

“No, you didn’t. He’s still here!” the thing that was Tommy laughed. Its throat cleared again.

“No, I did,” Karl said. His brow furrowed. “You looked exactly the same.”

“Not me like this. The me that looked like an Egg.”

“Why would you look like an Egg?”

“...we’ll try again at base,” the thing that was Tommy gasped. It gave a jerky wave at Dream. “You have sealed your fate.”

“So have you,” said Dream firmly. The thing that was Tommy paused. He let his mask stare at the thing, and it grinned over wide.

“We’ll see.”

It strode away, and Karl blinked, waved at Dream, and then followed it. Dream's legs unbuckled beneath him. He held onto Peace even as he fell onto his knees to the ground.

"What was that?"

The accusation flung from his left, and Dream looked parallel into blood red eyes.

"What deal is he talking about. And why is he talking to that airhead?"

"Airhead is a time traveler," Dream said blankly. "He's going to undo the deal we made."

"Again," the piglin hybrid grit out, "what deal?"

"Doesn't matter," Dream said, bracing himself and maneuvering himself upright. He felt heat pressing against his arms and face. Pain whispering promises of return up his arms and down his knees. He stepped forward on steady legs. "You need medical attention. Can you carry Phil?"

"I've carried him this far," Techno snorted. One shoulder jutted out too far, and blood marred the once white shirt and ripped pants. Giving Peace one last squeeze, Dream held him out.

"I'll take him. Just keep this one out of trouble," Dream muttered, the words pushed out and garbled. Better to loosen his hold than have the tiny piglin ripped out of it.

Blood red eyes scanned him from top to bottom, and then the arm attached to the unmarred shoulder stretched out and carefully reached out to the tiny Piglin. Peace gave a delighted squeal and leapt at Techno's chest, and with only a small fumble, the piglin hybrid caught him. Peace bumped against Techno's jaw gently and then flailed his arms over Techno's uninjured shoulder. He gave a small, pleased snort.

Dream's mouth twitched, and he tried to engrave the tiny piglin's form into his soul. He then turned to Phil. Bending down, he stretched out to grab the man, but he hesitated. Where could he grab—?

“Techno!” came a delighted cry. Niki dashed in their direction, and Dream watched as she nearly leapt at the piglin hybrid. She abruptly stopped. Her face twisted into concern. “What happened? Are you okay?”

“Been better,” Techno grunted. He tilted his head to where Dream stood next to Phil's side. “Phil could use some help.”

Niki raised an eyebrow at Dream. He made a jerky motion towards Phil, and Niki briefly rolled her eyes before she bent down to examine the fallen Avian. A tiny gasp and then a choked sob.

“His wings,” she garbled. Dream winced behind the mask. The wide black wings that had often flared behind Phil lay limp and spread on the ground. Chunks of feathers clumped together with wide bloody absences gaping between them. The arc of the wings staggered and sharply pointed where they should curve. The wing the vines had pulled had twisted and fallen on the other wing in a direction it should not bend.

“Don't worry. Nothing that a few gapples and regen potions won't cure. He's been through worse,” Techno said with half-attempted amusement.

“Should he be moved?” Dream asked quietly. Techno snorted.

“Doesn't matter if he should or shouldn't? We can't treat him here, and if we could, I wouldn't want him treated anywhere where the undone omelet could creepily stalk him.”

Dream's mask stared in Techno's direction. The piglin hybrid's breaths were coming out harsher, but Techno still managed effortlessly to give him an annoyed, flat look. Dream's hand slipped back into the code and ran the former command again with a slightly edited output. Phil vanished.

“Huh,” Techno grunted, his face widening in surprise. “Why didn’t you do that earlier?”

“...didn’t want to,” Dream huffed. No point mentioning the thing threatening him from the other side of his barrier. It didn’t matter what he did or didn’t do. And it especially didn’t matter *why* he did things.

A growl vibrated from Techno’s chest, but Niki cut him off.

“Where’d you put him?”

“Ranboo’s room,” Dream replied. The endermen hybrid had mentioned making his own little house next to Dream’s. Not that he would be able to now. But no point stopping the illusion now. They didn’t need to know.

“Alright. I’ll grab the potions and bandages from the basement,” she said. She paused and glanced at Dream. Dream tilted his head, realized what she was doing, and nodded. With a small smile, Niki hurried to the house.

“If you were going to TP Phil, why am I holding this little one?” asked Techno as he followed Niki at a slow pace. Dream matched Techno’s sagging stride and didn’t look at Peace.

“...I am doing you a favor,” Dream replied. And he didn’t want to have Peace torn from his grasp. He couldn’t let himself—he had to be ready.

“Everything is about favors with you, isn’t it?” Techno scoffed. “It’s strange. I don’t remember you being like that when you invited me onto the server. One of the first things you did was give me free stuff. I miss that Dream.”



Dream said nothing. There was nothing to say. That Dream had long since been killed. And this Dream wouldn't last much longer. Nothing he said or did ever mattered.

"So...considering you kicked us out, what made you change your mind and let us in?" Techno asked casually. As if he hadn't pleaded and begged for Dream's protection and convinced Dream to once again sacrifice everything he had for the people on this server. As if Dream wouldn't once again pay the penalty for being the one in charge, the one who the server and everyone expected to fix things. The one blamed when everything went wrong and not when anything went right. "Not that I'm complaining. Just curious."

And yet here he was, once again putting his life, his safety (happiness?) on the line for people who likely would turn on him at first opportunity. But...Tommy's body impaled and vivisected—

At least the thing wouldn't be using Tommy's body much longer. (And it wouldn't be his fault if it did though he knew he would somehow still hold the blame.)

"DREAM!"

The yell startled Dream. A tiny squeal echoed the cry, and tiny arms reached out for him. Dream dodged them, dodged the tall figure rushing towards Techno, and ran. He leapt up the stairs and dove into his room. Reflexively barrier blocks stacked in front of the door. Dream dropped into the space beside the bed next to the wall. He focused on the sunlight that crawled over the bed and placed folded hands into his lap.

And he waited.

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"Dream! Come out! This brat of yours won't stop whining."

Dream could hear the whines and squeals. The pleas. The calls for him. But he ignored them. They wouldn't exist much longer.

“It’s been over two days. Niki has been talking about breaking through the roof and dropping down sandwiches and steaks to make sure you’re not starving. You know, because if you die, the rest of us are as good as dead anyway.”

He didn’t move. His legs tingled, and his stomach both grumbled and turned. But it would be over soon. Maybe the Egg was waiting to see if Dream would attempt to follow through on his threat. Then the Egg would unravel all his work in one swoop just when he thought he’d succeeded. It wanted to give him hope and then it would take it away. But it would get bored soon.

“This is ridiculous! I did not nearly die getting here twice so that you could throw a pity party, starve yourself, and let the one safe place on the server collapse!”

Dream hummed one of his tunes (the ones that he had had many lonely hours to compose) to drown the piglin hybrid’s tirade out. This one had been composed on a day that he had contemplated the plant Bad might bring on the demon’s next visit. It ended with high notes on a major scale amidst thoughts of sunshine and wind. He didn’t look out the window, instead internalizing the memories of running through the woods away from L’Manberg and hoeing rows of every crop he could logically plant except potatoes. He would become reacquainted with potatoes soon enough.

A loud, pained squeal drew him out of memories of scaling the house after a rainstorm to watch the glittering drops on the grass and trees. He peeked around the bed and saw Techno flapping his hand back and forth. A yellow glow faded from the pink skinned fingers, and Dream almost smirked at the image before tilting his head.

“How did you activate that?”

“So it speaks,” Techno answered gruffly. Blood red eyes zoomed onto his mask. With great effort, Dream did not lean back and hide. “Funny thing. Phil was worried that the undone omelet would catch us and use his Admin powers for evil. So he temporarily transferred them over to me.”

Techno with Admin access? That was a terrifying thought. If the Egg wasn't able to go through with his threat—But no. No point considering impossibilities (he'd done that enough).

“No you don't!” Techno cried as Dream leaned back. He caught the piglin hybrid's desperate lunge into the barrier blocks. They didn't budge, as expected. Dream returned to staring at the wall. “Get back here, Dream. Get back here or I'll—do something I might regret. And I don't regret much. Something like slicing your baby piglin in half.”

Blood and lifeless white eyes flittered through Dream's thoughts, but he pushed the image back. It wasn't real. And even if it was, even if Techno did go through with that threat, it wasn't like Dream wasn't going to lose Peace anyway.

“Come on, Dream. What do I have to do to get you out of there? You can't keep living like this, man. You really will die.”

Dream snorted softly. As if his death mattered. He'd die, and the server would choose another Admin. Possibly Techno, if he truly had Admin access at the moment. And then Techno could do whatever he wanted. So could Niki and Ranboo and Ender. And they would take care of Peace (because they were not heartless like—).

No one wanted or needed him. They didn't have to pretend.

“You're not helping, Techno,” came Niki's voice from the doorway. Outside of the times she had offered him food, she hadn't come near here. Why was she here now? The barrier still stood. “Look, Dream. We're here for whenever you want to come out, okay? Phil's getting better. His wings are almost healed thanks to the regen potions and gapples you had stored up. You have to come out soon so that we can discuss how to go about getting more. Not to mention that Ranboo wanted to show you—well I think you can guess what, but he didn't want me to tell you soooo I'm not telling you he finally managed to do something with that boat you gave him. You should come out and see.”

“What thing with a boat?” asked Techno. “And why would he want to show Dream?”

“You’d know if you weren’t clinging to Phil’s bedside like undone sick bun dough.”

A wet squeak interrupted the conversation, and the silence implied various eyes in Dream’s direction.

“I don’t get it. He flipped out what Phil dezombified the kid, and now he just dumped him on me like he didn’t banish us for touching him.”

“That’s why I’ve been saying something is really wrong with him,” Niki said, each word strained. “Dream, Peace misses you. Can he at least come in?”

He let his silence answer for him.

“We’re going to have to take drastic measures, aren’t we?” Niki said in a sigh.

“Looks like,” Techno said with a bit too much eagerness. Dream ignored them. It didn’t matter. They didn’t care. And he...he wanted to be left alone. He would be alone. No point pretending. No point trying. He had wanted to be alone anyway. He could take solace in that at least.

His stomach dully ached, and his legs tingled. The heat of the sunshine nearly completed the picture. At least there was no real pain yet.

---

A sudden buzz from above him had Dream vaguely looking up. Two dress shoes stood various blocks above him on what appeared to be thin air. Another visible block broke, and red and green eyes peered down at him. At his mask. He let the mask stare back.

The forehead between the red and green eyes furrowed, and then they closed. A more focused gaze bore into his mask. The enderman hybrid screeched.



The screeches grew louder, but the humming shifted into a song he'd composed when remembering the wind. He hadn't composed since coming back. He vaguely wondered why.

His stomach didn't ache anymore. He probably couldn't move. But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. He'd be going back soon. He hoped the Egg would stop toying with him and send Karl...

A popping noise came from the other side of the bed. Maybe that was the sound of the timeline being overwritten. He didn't really know what that sounded like, since last time he had been outside of the timeline. He hoped the waiting had finally come to an end.

Peace bumped his head against Dream's mask. Dream stared at him. Peace bumped his head more insistently. Dream didn't move. With a grunt, Peace grabbed the sides of Dream's mask and tore it away from his face. Dream winced but didn't get a chance to reach for the fallen mask before Peace climbed Dream's hoodie and pushed his forehead into Dream's. Peace squeaked and grunted, and wet drops spilled onto Dream's face.

“Pa..pa...,” Peace squealed, not in Piglin but in Human. “Comf...bagh. P’eas.”

Dream blinked and... *torn away but tears she couldn't it would hurt but it hurt now Peace hurt now* ... gently pressed back. Peace squeaked out sobs and wrapped himself around Dream's head. Slowly, heavily, Dream lifted his hand and spread it over Peace's back.

Fumbling and with more than one stumble, Dream lifted himself off the floor and onto his bed. Peace held onto his face for the whole time, and Dream had to pause as he flopped onto the bed because the tingles had returned painfully to his legs. After a few moments, he readjusted so that Peace was under his chin and no longer pressing against his nose and making it hard to breathe. He began to hum Peace's song.

Peace's squeaking sobs settled down, and the tiny piglin nuzzled into Dream's chest. Dream pressed his cheek onto Peace's head and smelled the slightly smoky sweet scent of baby piglin. His hand rubbed up and down Peace's back, memorizing the feel of the tiny trusting child in his arms. Perhaps...this was better. Even if it would end, at least the memory would be fresh. As would the wound, but then it never would have healed either way.

A small grunt gave him a slight warning before Peace pushed away from his chest. He pulled a gapple, likely from his own inventory, and pushed it against Dream's lips. Dream gently pushed it away, but Peace grunted and pushed it back.

“Ee..eed,” the tiny piglin squeaked. Dream briefly considered taking the gapple and placing it out of sight in his inventory but...the Egg was taking its time. And he couldn't—he wouldn't pollute this memory by fading away in front of Peace. He took a bite. His body instantly demanded more, but he knew it would be better to chew slowly before eating more.

Slowly, he finished a quarter of the gapple and then put it away. Peace squealed in protest, but Dream merely grabbed him and wrapped him up tight in his arms. Peace—this child would miss him. This child didn't—he could have bonded with Techno. But he didn't. He insisted on Dream. Dream mattered to him. And...maybe that would be enough. When he returned, he'd remember that most of all. One person that even Quackity couldn't refute was on his side.

For Peace, Dream wasn't a monster. He wasn't—wasn't a tool. To Peace, Dream was... Dream was Papa. And...that mattered.

## Chapter End Notes

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \triangle \Delta \mathbb{U} \mathbb{U} \boxplus \omega \lambda \circ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Delta \otimes \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \neq \Delta \times \times \mathbb{I} \omega \times$ ,” - “The wall does not have the barrier,”

“ $\mathbb{I} \overline{\Phi} \omega \mathbb{U} \omega \times \circ \times \overline{\Phi} \omega \boxplus \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \times \circ \sqcap \sigma \sqsubseteq \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \mathfrak{h}$ .” - “I teleported through them.”

“ $\lambda \circ. \circ \lambda \mathbb{U} \nmid \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \Delta \boxplus \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \lambda$ .” - “No. Only the admin.”

“ $\mathfrak{h} \Delta \nmid \mathbb{I}?$ ” - “May I?”

“ $\mathbb{I} \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \mathbb{I} \lambda \sigma^{\circ} \lambda \circ$ ,” - “I think so,”

“ $\mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \mathcal{J} \sqcap \mathbb{U} \mathbb{U} \nmid \neq \Delta \times \times \mathbb{I} \circ \Delta \boxplus \omega \boxplus \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \times \lambda \omega \mathbb{U} \mathcal{J}?$ ” - “You fully barricaded yourself?”

“ $\mathbb{U} \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqcap \lambda \mathbb{I} \lambda$ .” - “Let us in.”

“ $\Delta \boxplus \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \lambda. \triangle \sqsubseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi} \mathbb{I} \lambda \Delta \times \circ \lambda \sigma? \mathbb{U} \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqcap \lambda \sqsubseteq \omega \mathbb{U} \neq. \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap' \mathbb{U} \mathbb{U} \boxplus \mathbb{I} \omega$ .” - “Admin. What is wrong? Let us help. You'll die.”

“ $\triangle \sqsubseteq \nmid \Delta \times \omega \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \mathbb{U} \mathbb{I} \sigma^{\circ} \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \mathbb{I} \lambda? \triangle \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \circ \sqcap \sigma \sqsubseteq \overline{\Phi} - \triangle \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \circ \sqcap \sigma \sqsubseteq \overline{\Phi} \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \triangle \omega \times \omega \sigma \omega \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \mathbb{I} \lambda \sigma^{\circ} \neq \omega \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \omega \times?$ ” - “Why are you like this? We thought-we thought you were getting better?”

“ $\neq \mathbb{U} \omega \Delta \lambda \omega, \neq \mathbb{U} \omega \Delta \lambda \omega, \Delta \boxplus \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \lambda. \boxplus \omega \omega \Delta \mathfrak{h}. \mathbb{U} \omega \overline{\Phi} \sqcap \lambda \mathbb{I} \lambda. \mathbb{U} \omega \overline{\Phi} \mathfrak{h} \omega \mathbb{I} \lambda$ .” - “Please, please, Admin. Dream. Let us in. Let me in.”

“ $\mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap' \times \omega \mathcal{J} \Delta \mathbb{U} \mathbb{U} \mathbb{I} \lambda \sigma \overline{\Phi} \circ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \neq \mathbb{U} \mathbb{I} \sigma \sqsubseteq \overline{\Phi}! \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \lambda \Delta \mathbb{I} \boxplus \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \triangle \circ \sqcap \mathbb{U} \boxplus \lambda' \overline{\Phi}. \mathcal{H} \circ \sqcap \neq \times \circ \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \lambda \omega \boxplus!$ ” - “You're falling to the blight! You said you wouldn't. You promised!”



# Fixing What's Breaking

## Chapter Summary

Talking is hard. Getting angry is not.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Peace had only had four gapples, which meant that Dream had to go get food. He couldn't let Peace go without, no matter how long he had until—

Grabbing Peace, Dream settled the sleeping piglin's head onto his shoulder. He went to the open doorway and removed the barrier blocks. The silent man headed down the stairs and into the kitchen. A figure wrapped in red lay slumped in the dining room table.

On soft steps, Dream made his way over to the chest nearest the oven. He withdrew a stack of bread and cheese and turned to sneak back out of the kitchen. A wide shouldered piglin hybrid stood in the way.

“Good to see you up and about,” Techno grumbled. He gave a few slow bleary blinks. His mouth opened wide in a yawn. “Now before you re-barricade yourself in your room, how's about we do something different like, I dunno, talking about what we are going to do. Or maybe what happened between you and the undone omelet that had you hiding in your room for over five days?”

“How about we don't,” Dream said quietly. He tried to slip past the half-awake hybrid. But Techno shifted to stand right in Dream's way.

“Look. Something happened back there. Something that made you give up. And I think I've known you long enough that giving up—it's not something you do. Or it wasn't something you did until after the Pogtopia/L'Manberg War. And given your ridiculous cryptic remarks, my guess is time travel is somehow involved.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Sure it doesn’t,” Techno said as he crossed his arms. “Our only way to keep the barrier up near starved himself because of something the undone omelet said, but it doesn’t matter. We should definitely keep letting him do that.”

“...the barrier is tied to my life. Not my position as Admin. If I die, then you or Phil will be chosen as this server’s Admin.”

“What?” Techno answered flatly.

“When I die, you can build your own barrier,” Dream said, condescension dripping from every word. He spotted a gap on Techno’s left side and slipped through it. A hand clamped onto his shoulder.

“So we should let you starve to death,” Techno said in the same flat tone.

“Why would it matter?”

“Why would it matter if you die? What kind of question is that?”

Dream didn’t answer. He was waiting for the hold on his shoulder to loosen, but it tightened instead.

“What happened to you?” asked Techno. Blood red eyes lowered and peered into his own. He removed a hand from Peace’s back and moved to slip his mask over his face. No, he couldn’t do that. It was on the floor next to his bed upstairs. How could he have forgotten it? He struggled to take a step back. “What did the undone omelet do to you?”

Dream froze, and then hot, acrid laughter bubbled up his throat and burst. The wild, cackling laughter finally caused the grip to loosen and disappear, but the laughter held Dream in place. A small protesting snort cut through the laughter and softened it to chuckles. Hard, green eyes flicked into blood red.

“It saved me,” he said as the loose hand moved to stroke the back of Peace’s sleeping head. “The rest of the server locked me away and left me to rot. The only one to visit me in my tiny dark cell did so to cut me and pound me and make me scream for the pleasure of it, whatever his claims that he only wanted information. And then the Egg visited me with an offer to get me out. All it asked for was that I let it have the rest of the server. Let it have all those who had gladly rid themselves of the monster Admin in their midst. Who had cheered and helped lock me away.

“I agreed. And guess what? The Egg held up its part of the bargain, so I did the same.”

Techno’s mouth opened and then shut, and Dream managed to seal away the dark chuckles. He brushed past Techno and went for the stairs, slightly bouncing Peace as he went.

“Where was I?”

“Hm?” Dream paused, allowing himself a glance back. The pigling hybrid’s shoulders were slumped, and the blood red eyes had dulled. Was he falling back to sleep? Because it looked like—

“Where was I?”

“Busy,” Dream snapped. He took a deep breath, the message engraved in his brain. “You were busy.”

He walked up the stairs, every step heavy and exhausted. He hated it. He hated thinking—

Hurried pounding footsteps, and a hand on his shoulder kept him from entering his room.

“I’m not busy now,” said Techno. “And neither are you. Tell me what happened.”

“I already did,” Dream scoffed, tearing his shoulder out of Techno’s grip.

“No, you didn’t. You said some cryptic stuff about how I was busy and the whole server, including your own supposed Dream Team, treated you like s—. Try again.”

“Why?” Dream grumbled. He faced the pushy piglin hybrid. “If you kill me, you can have a control of your barrier. So why don’t you do it?”

“See. This is why we need to talk,” the piglin hybrid snorted. “Look, I know I’m not the best at this, but this can’t be healthy. You’re acting like you want to die. Like you want to have me slice you in half and take your place as Admin.”

“What if I do?” Dream demanded. He took a step closer to the tall hybrid and stared straight into his face. “What if I call in that favor and ask you to do just that? Become the Admin. Save the server. Destroy the Egg. Wouldn’t that be easier? You wouldn’t have to even feel guilty about it, because I *asked* you to. You could be a hero and save the whole server by defeating not one but *two* monsters. Everyone would be thrilled.”

Breaths came in uneven gulps and chuckles as Dream grinned, imagining the scenario. Technoblade, the hero. What poetic justice for a man who knew exactly what happened to heroes.

“Okay. You’ve lost it. Completely and utterly certifiably insane,” Techno flatly intoned. “You know I’m no hero.”

“Oh, but you would be,” said Dream in a deep breath. The grin settled less wildly on his face. Another giggle escaped his lips. “You would be.”

“And besides, I don’t know about everybody else, but I’m fairly certain there are a few of us who would be anything but thrilled.”

“Don’t lie,” Dream snorted. A large pig-skinned hand lifted and pressed against the tiny head on Dream’s shoulder.

“I’m not.”

The grin on Dream’s face flattened. “He would forget.”

“Something as traumatic as the piglin hybrid he begged you to protect slicing you in half? Doubt it. Not to mention what Niki would do to me.”

“I’m sure Niki would be heartbroken if the man who teleported her favorite people into danger and then refused to bring them back died. She would be devastated that the fields are now all hers.”

“Of course. That’s why she’s made nothing but plain bread for days. The only food that she’s given any effort to in the last four days are the meals she’s offered you. And she won’t let anyone else touch them. Pretty sure she has them all stored in a chest of hers.”

Dream’s mouth opened and then closed. His brow wrinkled. Had Niki really been making plain bread? He checked the bread in his inventory and...it was plain bread. He fumbled, carefully keeping his grip on Peace, and then withdrew a loaf. It tasted warm and like earth. Or rather dirt.

“You wouldn’t know where that chest is?” Dream said with a grimace as he put the bread back in his inventory.

“I might,” Techno said smugly. “Wanna call in a favor?”

“Maybe,” Dream said. “How do I know you actually know where it is?”

“He doesn’t,” said Niki as she stepped onto the top of the stairs. “But if you promise to actually eat, I’ll show you where it is myself.”

“Niki? Did we wake you up?” said Techno sheepishly.

“Did that extremely loud ‘conversation’ wake me up? What do you think?” said Niki. “Better to ask who isn’t up.”

“...sorry,” Dream said softly.

“How about saving the apologies and coming with me so that you can get some actual food in you instead of subsisting on gapples?”

Dream nodded and walked up the stairs.

“Not you,” Niki said, shooting a glare over Dream’s shoulder. “You go check on Phil. Relieve Ranboo. You know how Ender’s been.”

“Fine,” Techno grunted grumpily. Niki walked towards her room while Techno turned into the room right after the stairs. Dream cautiously entered Niki’s room.

“You can place Peace on my bed,” Niki said as she rifled through an ender chest. “Poor baby has to be exhausted given that he somehow slept through your and Techno’s ‘conversation.’”

Dream obeyed and gently placed Peace on the soft yellow bed, straightening the rumpled covers to better suit the child. He sat on the bed next to the sleeping baby piglin and glanced at the flowers in pots next to the window. Several cookbooks lay scattered in the bookshelves under them. The bedside table had not a cookbook but the crop rotation book he hadn’t seen in over a month.

A plate landed on his lap abruptly.

“Eat up,” said Niki. Dream glanced down at the plate filled to the brim with food. He stared back up at Niki. She gave him a lopsided smile. “Wasn’t sure what you felt like eating.”

Dream tilted his head before remembering he didn't have his mask on. Slumping his shoulders, he picked up a loaf of bread from the tangle of food. He took a bite. The warm soft buttery taste caused his stomach to grumble. It was gone quicker than he meant, and he forced himself to take his time choosing the next item.

“Did it taste stale?” Niki asked, and Dream quickly shook his head.

“No, I just...I haven’t eaten a lot, and I need to pace myself. But it was so good I couldn’t help myself.”

“It was, huh,” Niki said smugly. Dream stared down at his plate. He picked up a cheese when a screech made him drop it.

“[ $\neg$ ] $\psi$   $\Delta$   $\mathfrak{h}$ !  $\nVdash$   $\perp$   $\Delta$   $\Omega$ !”

Before Dream could answer, the enderman hybrid leapt at him. He lifted up his arms to ward off the expected blow, but the long white and black arms circled under his shoulders. A head rested next to his neck.

"Λ⊕ΩΨϰ ϣ⊖ ⅈ⊆Δⅈ ΔσΔιλ," the hiss in his ear demanded. Dream's awkwardly held arms dropped and then circled around the boy's back.

"I—I didn't mean—" The explanation tangled in his mouth. He swallowed and tried again.  
 "I'm {〇ㄟㄟㄥ, ㄣㄥㄩㄣㄣ."

"ᐃᑭᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐱᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐅᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐱᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ," Ender hissed harshly into Dream's ear. "ᐃᑭᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐱᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐅᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ ᐱᓴᓂᓄᓇᓲᓗ."

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi$   $\{ \Psi \rightarrow \Diamond \Psi \wedge \Delta \sqcup \Pi U \}$   $\{ \Pi \rightarrow \Diamond \Diamond \Psi \}$   $\nVdash$   $\Psi \wedge \Delta \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq$ ,” Dream softly admitted.

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi$   $\{ \Psi \rightarrow \Phi \} \sqsubseteq \Delta \{ \{ \Gamma \rightarrow \Phi \} \rightarrow \Psi \rightarrow \Gamma \}$ .  $\Delta \models \neg \Delta \rightarrow \Gamma$   $\{ \Gamma \rightarrow \Phi \} \sqsubseteq \Gamma \rightarrow \overline{\Phi}$   $\nVdash \neg \Psi$ ?  $\{ \Gamma \rightarrow \Phi \} \Delta \Delta \wedge \overline{\Phi} \rightarrow \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Gamma \rightarrow \overline{\Phi}$   $\Gamma$ ?”

“No!” Dream burst out, wincing as he realized that he had yelled in Ender’s ear. Ender pulled away from him and settled his and Ranboo’s face inches away from Dream.

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi \wedge \Delta \sqsubseteq \nabla$ ?”

"I...I didn't—I ♪♫♪♭'☐ △△♠☐ ☐◉ ⊆∩≠☐," Dream hissed.

“ $\neg \Pi \overline{\Phi} \nVdash \Omega \Delta \Psi \wedge \Psi \sqsubseteq \Pi \curlywedge \overline{\Phi} \Im \sigma$ ,” Ender hissed, the declaration filled with pain and air.

[illegible]

"... $\Delta \sqsubseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi}$  is  $\nVdash_{\Omega} \neg \sqsubseteq \Psi U \neq I \wedge \sigma \sqsubseteq \neg \overline{\Phi}$ ?" Dream screeched in quiet challenge.

“ $\triangle \subseteq \triangle \overline{\Phi} \text{ is } \text{is } \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \cup U \neq \{ \}$ ?” Ranboo screeched quietly back. “ $\neq U \cup \triangle \{ \cup U \cup \overline{\Phi} \cap \} \overline{\Phi} \neq \{ \}$ .”

Dream's fingers gripped the back of Ranboo's black suit jacket. The enderman hybrid didn't twitch. Letting out a breath, Dream conceded.



“Okay. We can—I’ll try.”

Ender nodded, let Dream go, and settled on the floor next to Dream’s legs. He leaned his head pointedly against Dream’s thigh. A fur tipped tail also wrapped itself against Dream’s ankle. Dream held out a second loaf of bread, and Ender quickly grabbed it and took a large, aggressive bite.

“Looks like you weren’t the only one who thinks my bread is good,” Niki said, grinning. A slight confusion shadowed her eyes, but when Dream tilted his head, her brown eyes sparkled. “Better get to eating. I think I can see the tiny lump on the bed moving.”

Sure enough, the tiny piglin snuffled and snorted as he stretched his limbs and pushed himself upright. Wide white eyes saw the plate on Dream’s lap, and Peace eagerly moved closer to Dream’s lap. A short squeak pointedly pleaded at Dream while the wide eyes grew larger.

Stifling a chuckle, Dream gave the tiny piglin a carrot from the plate. Peace dug in eagerly before making grabby motions for more. He instantly retrieved the cheese and held it out. It was gone in a few seconds.

The plate was pulled from Dream’s lap as he reached for a piece of pound cake.

“No,” Niki said. Her face was dark with a frown. “I didn’t give this to you so that everyone else can eat. Don’t pretend you’re not starving. I saw you stuff your face with that bread earlier. I understand wanting to give the little one food, but you need to eat too. I’ll give him his own plate as long as you eat yours.”

Dream hummed his agreement, his throat thick and useless at the moment. Niki handed the plate back. She pulled another smaller plate from the chest filled with food and gave it to Peace who squealed his thanks. He quickly shoved the various pieces of carrots and steak stir fry on his plate. Dream grunted, and Peace stopped.

A small rag was pulled out of Dream's inventory and wiped across Peace's face. He then stored the rag and pulled out a spork which he handed the child. Peace squealed thanks again and then started spooning the food into his mouth.

"Huh. I didn't know he knew how to use utensils," Niki muttered.

"Why wouldn't he?" Dream defended. "He's very smart."

"Dream, I've barely seen you use utensils."

"You bring me finger foods."

"You usually have your head stuck in a book," Niki countered. Dream remained silent. "Just eat your food."

With a smirk, Dream pulled out a fork and stuck it in a nearby carrot. He brought it to his mouth and delicately nibbled on it. Niki sighed and rolled her eyes.

"᠙᠔△^ i □△᠔᠔ ᠎᠔᠔᠔?" screeched an enderman hybrid with wide red and green eyes. Rolling her eyes again, Niki pulled out two more plates and handed one to Ender. She also handed him a fork and knife while giving Dream a pointed look. "⊕□△^∞ ≠᠔᠔."

"You're welcome," Niki over-enunciated. Her pointed look softened and turned fully onto the enderman hybrid. "Don't forget to let Ranboo have some too, or he'll be grumpy later."

Ender gave an undecipherable hiss.

"Boys," Niki groaned. She stuck her own fork in her food and twirled her pasta. A delighted note followed the pasta entering her mouth. "Wow. Can one miss their own cooking?"

“...it’s your cooking? Why didn’t you just eat it?” Dream asked as he twirled the tiny piece of remaining carrot on his fork.

“I think you know the answer to that question,” Niki replied darkly. Her lips gave a small frown as she shook her head. “And if you don’t, we’ll help you figure it out. But enough talking and more enjoying my delicious food. So zip it until you eat every last bite.”

Dream nodded and finished his carrot. He speared a third loaf of bread after some difficulty, earning another annoyed look from Niki. As he took a bite, a piercing certainty flooded him. This wouldn’t last. The next second, it would be—could be gone. The food in his mouth replaced by the taste of hot air and iron. The soft bed would be hard obsidian. Nothing in the 120 block cell but him. Unless he was—

Sharp fingers poked at Dream’s thigh, and the warm, fluffy herb flavor registered on his tongue. A weight on his ankle helped him feel the soft covers below him. And a repeated sound of delight brought the full room into focus.

“I really need to make this recipe again,” Niki said almost to herself. She caught Dream’s gaze and tilted her full fork in his direction. “Want to try it.”

A quick remark about how he didn’t want her cooties tied in his loosening throat, and he shook his head and tore off a piece of the bread sloppily instead. Niki’s nose scrunched, and she purposefully looked away from him.

The poke at his side occurred again, and big, wide eyes stared at his bread. Taking advantage of Niki’s distraction, he plopped the rest of the bread on Peace’s plate. Peace squealed in delight and tore into it with gusto.

“Don’t think I didn’t see that,” Niki said. She pointed her empty fork at Dream. “Don’t make me take him away from you.”

His heart briefly paused beating, but the glint of something familiar and long forgotten in Niki’s eyes shortened the pause. Dream lifted his fork in surrender and turned back to his plate. He took a bite of the cake, letting it crumble into sweet pieces in his mouth. The head

pressed against his thigh again after Ender resettled in with his plate, and now a smaller forehead wiggled its way next to the plate and onto Dream's lap. Niki gave another humming note of delight and winked when Dream glanced at her.

He savored the sweet crumbs, adjusted his plate to let the tiny head use it as a pillow, and gave the woman across from a small smile. They hadn't disappeared. And...perhaps it could...stay that way...

Maybe it was worth a try?

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The pounding footsteps coming towards him had preemptively yanked his attention out of the book he had been studying. A large piglin hybrid plopped himself in the chair across from him and slumped onto the table between them, causing the papers Dream had placed there to scatter. Dream scowled behind his mask and placed his book on a now-lopsided stack.

"Pick up your big, fat head," Dream grumbled, trying to push aside Techno's head and dislodge the papers under the piglin hybrid's head. "I was using those."

"Sorry," Techno muttered, not moving a centimeter to help. "Thought you were using these scribbles to make it look like you were busy and hide here while Ranboo went on his cleaning spree."

"Yeah, no. I was here actually making myself useful. Ranboo's just bored and this place has been collecting dust since the day I finished it. Kinda of busy with other stuff. So if the kid wants to clean, let him."

"You only say that because he won't try to drag you into helping him," Techno grumbled. Dream snorted and then gave a grunt. Techno's pointed ears perked up, and he gave a growling grunt back. Rolling his eyes, Dream tore the papers out from under Techno and stacked them next to the books, which he also straightened. Techno squealed his signature low squeal, and Dream let out three low squeaks.

“Not bad,” Techno said, peeling himself off the table. “Too bad your vocal box makes you sound like a cute piglet.”

“I do not!”

“Trust me, you do,” said Techno leaning on his hand. It underlined his smirk. “You sound as adorable as the tiny thing that follows you around. Where is he by the way?”

“None of your business,” Dream snapped back. He did not sound like a baby piglin. And if he did, that would only be because the piglin he hung out with most was a baby. Wait. Was that why the Waste Passel always petted his head and traded him better items than they should? He bit back a groan as his cheeks grew warm. No. Techno was messing with him. He sounded like a human badly butchering their language at best. He did not sound like piglet!

“Sooo,” Techno said drawing out the word. “What are you doing that’s important enough to let your kid out of your sight?”

“He’s not—” Dream started before cutting himself off. Because as long as he was now, Peace was. “Kids need sun and exercise. I wasn’t going to keep him cooped up here with me while I try to figure out a way to root out the Egg out of the server’s code.”

“You know that would have been easier before the undone omelet had its disgusting red vines everywhere?”

“Didn’t have a reason to deal with it before.”

“You mean besides being the server’s Admin.”

“We had a deal. I kept it,” said Dream roughly reorganizing his papers. He let his mask glare at the piglin hybrid over the slightly neatened stack. “Besides, nothing I did last time helped. It might be easier now that everyone else is out of the way.”

“Of course. It’s definitely easier to fight a nearly omnipresent Egg and its army of brainwashed minions with what amounts to five and a half people.”

“It is a virus,” Dream defended. “As an Admin, I have counter for those. They are just riskier with people involved. If I ignore the people and focus on the virus alone, I can take it out with the proper preparation.”

“And by ignore, you mean...?” Techno prodded.

“If I don’t over-worry about their canon lives, I can free them from the Egg’s influence,” Dream said smoothing out his notes. “And since according to my calculations, Tommy was the only one on his last life, I can make use of the hardcore respawn mechanic to free them.”

“What about Phil?” Techno asked too casually. Dream peered at him through his mask. “He only has the one.”

“Yeah. But he’s here with us,” Dream said cautiously. “He shouldn’t be—” Horror-filled comprehension strangled the rest of the sentence. “Please tell me you did not bring an Egg-infected man into this house.”

“I wouldn’t call him infected, per se,” Techno said flippantly, though he wouldn’t look into Dream’s eyes. “He was just worried he *might* have been infected. It’s why he passed his Admin powers to me.”

“Might have been—are you crazy! Why didn’t you tell me sooner?!” Dream near screamed. He leapt out of his seat and ran to the door. Who was watching Phil now? From what he gathered from Ender, Niki, and even Ranboo, Phil hadn’t woken up since being brought here, so they had been taking shifts. But Niki had gone to work on the fields with Peace, and Ranboo was cleaning the generally unused portion of the back of the house. Had Techno left the possibly infected man alone!?

“I would have, but you decided to pout and hide in your room for nearly a week after we got here!” Techno called out, rushing after Dream as he leapt up the stairs. “You hadn’t exactly given me a chance.”

“You had plenty of chances! Why didn’t you say that when you came to visit me instead of threatening Peace?!”

“You wouldn’t come out for your precious brat, why would you have come out for Phil?” Techno growled. “Don’t you even dare think of killing him!”

“That’s the safest solution,” Dream growled back as he turned to Ranboo’s old room. Invisible blocks stopped him.

“I don’t care,” Techno said, as he violently pulled Dream away from the simply coded barrier blocks. “I won’t let you kill him. There has to be another way. You are the Admin of this server. F— act like it!”

“I’m trying!” Dream yelled into the piglin hybrid’s face. He grabbed Techno’s collar pushed the man against the wall and pulled out Nightmare. It remained tightly by his side. “I have always tried. But like always, no one lets me do my d— job. Something else is always more important. A drug van. So-called freedom. A destructive chaotic teenager who should f— know better! The need to have a f— villain so that no one on this server has to take responsibility for their s—. Your happily ever after all tied with a blood red bow made of everything that once made me human! If you want me to be the f— Admin, then let me f— do my d— job once without getting in the f— way!”

“Dream? Techno? What’s going on?” Ranboo asked. His green and red eyes flittered between Techno, Dream, and Nightmare. He had on an apron over his suit and a dirty duster in his hand. He gripped the duster and took half a step back. “Is—Is everything okay?”

“Ah, you know. Everything’s fine. Dream has some pent up aggression is all,” said Techno with crooked grin as he patted the hand bunched up in his dress shirt hard. Blood red eyes gave Dream’s mask a half-second glare. “I think he feels better now. Don’t you, Dream?”

Dream let the stupid pig's shirt go and turned to Ranboo.

"Go get Niki. We need to have a discussion about the things going on around this house," Dream said tightly. He marched over to the barrier blocks. A heavy hand gripped his shoulder, but he only tapped both blocks until they glowed. He added a couple of others and then tore his shoulder out of Techno's grip. He knew where the room's window pointed, and he wasn't taking chances. Ranboo stood frozen, eyes wide and unfocused. Dream tried to gentle his voice. "Fifteen minutes. In the library. Please."

Ranboo shook his head slightly and then nodded. Dream hurried down the stairs and rushed out the door. He had a room to fully barricade and little time to do it.

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"Ranboo said you wanted us to come here to talk," Niki said with her arms crossed. She sat next to Techno on the couch while Dream sat at the table. "Of course, you also scared him half to death by drawing your ax on Techno and growling at him."

Dream lifted up a finger in a patronizing wait motion. She scowled, but he ignored her and bent down to Peace who had hugged his leg as soon as the two entered. He patted the baby piglin. With a fortifying breath, he grunted at the room connected to the library. Peace gave a pitiful squeal, but Dream repeated his grunt. The tiny arms left his legs, and the wet white eyes fell to the floor.

Gently, he grabbed one of Peace's tiny, sharp hands. Making eye contact, he pulled a surprise he had fiddled with during his more frustrated research moments. A black stuffed bunny soon dangled from Peace's arms as the tiny piglin pulled it close. Dream tilted his head towards the door, and with a thankful squeal, Peace trotted into the mainly empty room with his new toy. Hopefully he wouldn't try anything with the enchantment table in there.

"How'd you make that?" asked Niki. Dream shrugged.

"Messing around."



“That was cute,” said Ranboo softly. His fidgeting in the chair on the opposite end of the table had stopped briefly. “Could you maybe show me how to make one later?”

“If you want,” Dream said cautiously. He’d see where the boy stood after this meeting. “Things are most likely going to get...tense. Do you want to switch with Ender?”

Ranboo’s flittering eyes focused on a wall, and then the boy shook his head jerkily.

“Ender thinks it’s better for me to stay and see for myself. Though he wants me to make it clear that we are not going to take sides. We’re—we’re going to stay neutral.”

Dream took a steadying breath. He’d stood alone more than once. He would do it again if it meant...if it meant protecting his server. The server that had sent him Ender and that housed Peace. The server was worth protecting. (Wasn’t it?)

He gestured at Techno. “Do you want to tell them, or should I?”

“Tell us what?” Niki asked (demanded). Brown eyes narrowed on Techno, and the piglin hybrid shifted uncomfortably.

“He found out about Phil,” Techno muttered. A sharp pain struck through Dream, and for an instant he couldn’t breathe.

“Found out what about Phil?” Niki repeated slowly, her forehead wrinkled and her eyes growing narrower. Breaths struggled up Dream’s throat.

“That he maybe, might have, you know, been infectedbytheEgg,” Techno finished in a rush. Ranboo gasped, and Niki jerked away from him. And Dream could breathe.

“He might have what!?” Niki shrieked, and despite the growing tension.

“Y-you’re j-joking, right Techno?” Ranboo stumbled as his green and red eyes flickered too fast around the room. Dream briefly wondered if the quickly changing view made the boy dizzy. “P-please tell me this is o-one of your bad jokes.”

“It’s not a joke, kid,” Techno muttered.

“Not a joke! Are you kidding me, Techno?!” Niki shouted, her fists stiffly by her sides. “Did you seriously risk the safety of everyone in here by bringing the infestation in!?”

“I said he might be infected. We don’t know he’s at all influenced by the undone omelet until he gets up!”

“W-we’ve been watching him,” said Ranboo with echoing horror. “What if he had woken up when one of us was there i-instead of you?”

“I had an alert on him,” Techno defended, his arms crossed as he pushed himself into his corner of the couch. “An Admin one. I read it in one of those dense tomes of Dream’s. Hard to make out anything when most of the words are numbers but not impossible.”

“You can read binary?” Dream asked, slightly distracted.

“Once I figured out which pattern of ones and zeros matched which letter and punctuation mark, more or less. Took me two days to figure it out. Why don’t you have Admin instruction manuals in plain old Human?”

“Because reading binary is one of the skills every Admin needs,” said Dream. He crossed his own arms. “That does not mean you did it right. When you’re starting out, you need someone to double check your work. You cannot just assume it worked. If you made even the smallest mistake, you might as well have kept him asleep longer. And that’s the best case scenario.”

“That’s a hyperbole and you know it,” Techno snorted. Blood red eyes settled on his mask in challenge. “Because if that was true, who helped you?”

“The server itself,” Dream snapped. “There aren’t an overabundance of Admins, so the server had to do it herself. The same server the rest of you ran straight into the ground!”

“It was your job to protect it!” Techno growled.

“I tried!” Dream roared.

“Boys! Enough!” Niki said, physically standing between the two heaving men. “This isn’t helping anything! We have to figure out what we’re going to do about Phil.”

“Dream wanted to kill him,” Techno said through clenched teeth. Brown and red-and-green gazes flew to Dream who held steady and stiff.

“I said that was the safest solution,” Dream said tonelessly. “There are others. But I cannot check if they work if you don’t even let me get close to him.”

“I won’t let you kill Phil,” Techno repeated, voice hard and forbidding. Dream didn’t flinch.

“Dream, if there is any other way, even the smallest sliver of a chance that there is another way, will you insist we kill Phil?” Niki asked, barely a quiver in her voice.

“No. I won’t,” Dream said firmly. His words came easily and smoothly, as they often did when he needed to talk his way out of conflict. The truth tempered with carefully chosen silence. “As long as it doesn’t put the rest of us in danger, we’ll consider every possible alternative.”

“You hear that, Tech,” said Niki, turning to the fuming piglin hybrid. “He isn’t going to kill Phil. Not unless there is no other choice.”

“Killing Phil is not an option,” Techno said flatly. His blood red eyes boring into Dream.

“It might have to be,” Niki said softly, earning the blood red glare. “Tech, if it comes down to us or Phil, which would Phil want you to choose?”

The piglin hybrid’s shoulders fell, and his gaze slipped away from all of them. The line of Niki’s own shoulders curved and shuddered. She walked over to Techno and wrapped an arm around the much larger man. She almost dangled off his side for a moment, but he bent into her half-embrace.

“We’ll try everything else first. I promise,” Niki said quietly. She then pinned Dream with a narrowed look. “Right, Dream?”

Dream nodded one jerky bob, and Ranboo slumped before standing and making his way to Techno’s other side. Dream stayed where he was as he watched the scene. Alone on his side of the room. A familiar place. (Why was he trying?)

Techno’s large arms wrapped around both of the others before straightening and facing Dream.

“Your favors worthless, Teletubby?”

“Have they been so far?” Dream deflected, and the piglin hybrid gave a full nod.

“Better have you check out Phil then. Shoulda let you do it earlier, but now everything’s cleared up, so it’s not a total L,” Techno snorted. He turned towards the stairs, but his eyes looked hard at Dream one more time. “As long as your favors mean something, so will mine.”

Dream tilted his mask and let Techno head to the stairs. He glanced over at the next room and saw a tiny pair of white eyes skitter away. Bracing, he headed towards the stairs.

“Ranboo, check up on Peace,” said Dream. Ranboo nodded a nervous agreement, and Dream continued up the stairs to see exactly how soon they would turn on him.

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The red code lay nestled deep in the green and gold numbers.

“He is infected,” Dream announced. Niki’s hands flew to her mouth while Techno turned away. “Good news: it looks like the infection is still dormant. Bad news: if he comes in contact with the Egg in any way, it will grow active. Not that it might not any way, but it cannot grow any stronger without the Egg sending specific commands to it. So at worst, he will be slightly influenced to go looking for the Egg, but he should be able to fight it off.”

“Keep him away from the Egg. Got it,” said Niki. “See Tech. Options.”

“What about my alert?” Techno asked.

“What?” Dream startled. “Your what?”

“You said that when someone first starts using Admin powers or whatever, they should have their work double-checked or something.”

Dream paused. Ah, the alert. He studied the area around Phil. An alert had been placed near the man’s head, and if the man had lifted his head, it would have gone off. Not bad for a first time.

“What would have happened if he woke up but didn’t move?”

“Hyeh? The alert would have gone off?”

“No, it wouldn’t have. It is linked to the pillow, not to Phil,” Dream corrected. He pointed to the command hidden in the pillow’s code. “You should have had the command focused on Phil’s movement and not the relative condition of the pillow itself.”

The large man peered at the spot where Dream had pointed. A minute passed before the piglin hybrid grumbled and huffed.

“This would be easier with my glasses,” he muttered as he stuck his snout right near the code. Dream hadn’t seen his rival with glasses. But then they weren’t that close. And given how important having another steady hand that could dig through code would be—Dream reached into the server code and briefly tapped Creative. A pair of adjustable glasses exited the server’s code.

“Huh,” Techno grunted. He fiddled strangely delicately with the code, and the alert would now go off whenever Phil regained consciousness. Good. When Techno turned to him, Dream shoved the glasses onto his snout. “Nyeh?”

“You can’t always get that close to code to examine it,” Dream explained as the piglin hybrid fiddled and adjusted the glasses. The lenses grew thinner and thicker as they focused the blood red eyes. “Some code has proximity factors or alerts and tripwires. Given the knowledge the Egg has shown in corrupting code, it’s better to not take any chances.”

“Hey, these work better than my old ones,” said the piglin hybrid looking around the room eagerly. His bright gaze finally landed on Dream. “Any chance you want to teach me that trick in case these get smashed like the old ones?”

“Sorry. Server Admin privileges,” Dream said somewhere between bemused and amused. He could give Techno access, but...if there was a dire need, he would. A very dire need. “When Phil wakes up, you have to explain the situation to him. He cannot go near the barrier until we remove the Egg’s corruption.”

“Remove—you can do that?” asked Niki.

“It’s what I have been studying in the library all this time,” said Dream. “If I can find a counter for the Egg’s code, it would be possible to erase the Egg from the entire server in one fell swoop.”

“You want to build an antivirus for the Egg and destroy it by spreading it?”

“More or less. Its sentience complicates matters. The difficulty is getting it to spread fast enough to erase the Egg before it comes up with a defense.”

“So not all viruses are sentient?” asked Techno.

“No. Some are like human diseases where all they want is to replicate and survive. But given the way this one talks and acts, it can think beyond those two things. So it is much more dangerous.”

“How fast would the antivirus have to be?” asked Niki.

“Faster than it can think,” Dream said. “And since it seems to be trying to copy human motions and thought processes, the antivirus has to be faster than we can think.”

“And you can create that?” asked Techno.

“I can try,” Dream said. “But given that the Egg has shown it no longer fully fears my powers, I think I have a good chance of catching it off guard. Once at least. I have to get it right the first time.”

“Could you use the code it imbedded in Phil for practice or something?” asked Niki. Techno gave her a hard look, but she stayed focused on Dream. Dream hummed near silently and then nodded.

“It’s risky. The Egg might sense what I was doing. But it would be a good test run.”

“Phil isn’t a guinea pig,” said Techno.

“How about you double check any test I run before I do it,” said Dream. He doubted the newly-minted Admin would understand much of what he would be doing, but the temptation of a test run was too much. Dream preferred to be as over-prepared as possible. “And I only plan on trying it once. When I have fully coded the antivirus.”

“Didn’t you say that you wanted to focus on the virus and not ‘over-worry’ about people’s canon lives,” Techno accused.

“Yes,” said Dream. “But if it is going to work on Phil too, I would have to readjust using the hardcore respawn mechanic. It needs to be adjusted anyway, since we cannot let any of the Egg remain on the server, including in Phil. Besides we don’t know for certain if anyone else is on their last life. It wasn’t fully viable anyway.”

The restriction would add several days or weeks worth of study to his research, but if he could have a test subject—a practice run—the extra study would pay off. He really only had one try at this, and he had to be right. If he wasn’t—the server would crumble. Niki and Ranboo would be displaced, and Ender and Peace would—Dream would get this right. He’d fought under worse odds.

But a test run would help.

“Fine,” Techno gritted out. “But if anything happens to Phil, I will take it out of your hide.”

“Understood,” said Dream, biting back a comment about how he would like to see the bacon try. “Back to the library then.”



“I’m going to go do some baking,” said Niki with a broad smile. “Sugar helps boost brain power, right?”

“And peppermint,” said Techno.

“Isn’t that better for focus?” said Dream as he moved out of the room.

“Brain power, focus. We’re going to need both.”

Dream halted at the door and turned around to look at Techno.

“We?”

“Yes, we,” Techno stated. He stared at Dream and stood full height. “Unless you have a problem with that?”

“No,” Dream said slowly. He hid shaking hands in his cloak as he faced the piglin hybrid fully. His mask tilted. “If you can keep up that is.”

“Don’t worry,” Techno said with a smirk as he tilted down his head to look over his new glasses. “I’ll keep up.”

## Chapter End Notes

Ender translation:

“□×ω△ ♯! ♯○∏'×ω ±△ ∩○°!” - “Dream! you're back!”

“∧ω⊗ω× □○ ⊖□△ ⊖ △♠△∩∧,” - “Never do that again,”

“∩♯ ∫○××∕, ω∧□ω×.” - “I'm sorry, Ender.”

"ᐅᑭᓴᐱ'ᐸ ᑲᐃᔨᔪᔭ ᐱᕈ ᐳᑭᓴᐱ'ᔪᔭ ᐣᑭᔪᔪᐳ," - "Don't care if you're sorry,"

“𐎧𐎺𐎠'𐎡𐎹 𐎧𐎺𐎠 𐎡𐎹𐎡𐎹 𐎠𐎲𐎠𐎹𐎡𐎹.” - “Don't do it again.”

"ΦΞω {ω↗Δω↘ ΔΩΠΛΠ {Π↗ΩΠΩ ω↗ ΠωΔΦΞ," - "The server would survive my death,"

[illegible]

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi \wedge \Delta \sqsubseteq \vdash?$ ” - “Then why?”

I didn't want to hurt

“ $\vdash \Pi \overline{\Phi} \not\vdash \sqcup \Delta \Psi \times \Psi \sqsubseteq \Pi \times \overline{\Phi} \text{ i} \lambda \sigma$ ,” - “But you were hurting,”

“ $\Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \rightarrow \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi$ ”  $\{ \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \vdash \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \}$ .  $\text{If } \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \vdash \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \vdash \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi$ ,  $\Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi \vdash \Box \Delta \wedge \Box \Delta \Psi$ .” - “And we couldn't stop it. If you don't want to hurt, let us help.”

"... $\Delta \sqsubseteq \nabla \overline{\Phi}$  is  $\not\vdash_{\Omega} \neg \sqsubseteq_{\Psi} U \neq i \wedge \sigma \sqsubseteq_{\Lambda} \overline{\Phi}$ ?" - "...what if your helping hurts?"

“ $\Delta \sqsubseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi} \text{ is } \text{is } \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi U \neq \{?$ ” - “What if it helps?”

“ $\neq \cup \Delta \} \cup \cup \overline{\Phi} \cap \} \overline{\Phi} \neq$ .” - “Please let us try.”

## Is it Safe?

## Chapter Summary

Did you know De Nile is not only a river in Egypt? Too bad Dream seems unaware of this fact.

## Chapter Notes

Side Note: All relationships in this fic are platonic. Just in case anyone was wondering.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The fiftieth snort had Dream contemplating how Niki and Ranboo would feel if he explained that loud, constant snoring caused insanity and that it had to be stopped, even at the cost of a certain pig-brained fool's life. Ender would definitely back him up, given the way the enderman hybrid was glaring at the snoring piglin hybrid. And everyone wanted him to find an answer soon, so if the noise impeded his work and he smothered it, surely they couldn't be too mad?

"ᄙᆞᆯᆡ'ᆫ ᆮᆪᆺ ᆢᆻᆫᆽᆸ ᆼᆺᆹ?" Ender hissed. Huh. That was a thought. His hand dove into the code, and a second later the loud snorting stopped. The large warriors shoulders still rose and fell, and a puddle of drool still grew out of his open mouth and onto the table. Nice to know he could silence sounds from a particular source. Could he apply a similar code to the antivirus attacking the Egg's corrupt code? "ᆫᆼᆼᆡᆾᆰ ᆮᆪᆺ."

“ $\Lambda_{\ominus} \neq \Omega_{\oplus} \mathbb{L}_{\Psi \mathfrak{H}}$ ,” Dream replied in a mumbled hiss. The one and zeros scattered as his finger ran across the page. He pulled them out of the flat plane to float mid-air.

Taking a deep breath, he tightened his hold via squeezing his fingers together. The zeros near melded with the ones, and the code gave a crashing screech. The jumbled code spasmed and stretched to escape his control. Stretching his other hand, Dream reduced a scribbled paper into hundreds of zeros and ones. He poured the new reduced code into the jumbled mess and

watched the spasming code shift and link with the simple code. Using his now free hand, he sunk into the server's code and delicately created commands with brand new binary.

The jumbled code had turned acid green and had slowly changed the reduced white code into the same color. A quick flick, and Dream's new command code entered the contained area over his right hand. The lime green command code attacked the acid green, eliminating the spasming code. Unfortunately, none of the newly turned code had survived the assault. Dream cursed.

“Λ⊙ ϙ⊙⊙⊙?”

“Λ⊙ ϙ⊙⊙⊙,” Dream echoed in annoyed screech. He banished the remaining code.

“ΔΔΛΦ Δ ≡≡⊙Δ⊙?”

“⊙⊙⊙Δ≠. ≡ΔΛ≡⊙⊙ ΔΔΛΦ⊙⊙ Φ⊙ ΦΔ⊙⊙ Φ⊙ ≠⊙⊙,” Dream hissed in agreement. No matter how much he wanted to speedrun the process, coding was delicate work that could easily be disrupted by growing frustration.

“⊙⊙⊙Δ≠. ≡ΔΛ≡⊙⊙ ΔΔΛΦ⊙⊙ Φ⊙ ΦΔ⊙⊙ Φ⊙ ≠⊙⊙,” Ender screeched in amusement. Before Dream could reply (refuse), Ender put his head back and closed his eyes. The red and green eyes opened again and flittered away from Dream instantly.

Biting back a frustrated hiss, Dream tilted his head in hopefully neutral curiosity.

Ranboo didn't look at him before talking.

“So you know the thing with the boat?” asked Ranboo. Dream hummed a vague note, not certain where this was going. “I...I mastered it...”

Dream opened his mouth to agree when he realized the boy hadn't told him. Niki had. Which meant that...why was he telling Dream now?

"Would you...would you like to see it?"

"...sure," Dream said. The red and green eyes widened and landed on him for a whole five seconds before the tall boy stood and started to leave the library. He jerked once he'd passed the doorway and looked over his shoulder. Dream's lips twitched upward before he stood and followed.

"So Ender and I were wondering," Ranboo started as they walked out of the house. "What made you think of the boat thing?"

"Manhunts. It never hurt to be prepared," Dream said. He hummed a note to himself as his hunters' faces came to mind. "The boat MLG had the hunters losing their minds the first time I did it. Not quite as much as the time I used a boat to fly, but I don't think they expected me to up the plays like that."

"You used a boat to fly?!" Ranboo asked, his face not unlike the hunters. Dream frowned.

"Are you going to show me your boat MLG or not?" asked Dream. He didn't—This might have been a terrible idea.

"If I do it," Ranboo said, his gaze almost on Dream's mask, "would you teach me how to fly with a boat?"

Like landing on a boat, "flying" with one couldn't harm Dream. Especially if he didn't point out the one huge problem with it...But he'd taught them. And they—

"It's okay if you don't want to," Ranboo whispered. His eyes flittered onto the fields to Dream's left.

“Not today,” said Dream. Ranboo’s shoulders dropped.

“...and the bunny?” Ranboo whispered barely audibly. A second passed as Dream deciphered where that had come from. Oh. Peace’s bunny. He was likely dragging it through the dirt as he trotted along behind Niki.

Dream briefly glanced at the fields, and there was Niki throwing seeds onto the hoed rows while Peace covered them with dirt behind her. The bunny, which Peace had named Blacklet, was strapped to Peace’s back like it was a backpack. Or a basket. Dream smiled.

“That involved a lot of redstone and wool,” Dream replied. “If you want to see how I managed, the machine I used is in the back. There is an easier way to make one though.”

“...could I do it?”

“The easier way is not hard. Not compared to landing in a boat. Show me you can do that, and I will show you how to make a stuffed animal,” Dream said levelly. Unless Ranboo planned to bribe Peace into seeing Dream as a villain, the skill would be useless against Dream. And even that plan was weak. Peace was Dream’s.

“Okay,” Ranboo said with more enthusiasm. He began towering up on grass blocks. Dream kept an eye on him as the boy reached fifty blocks in height. Ranboo waved from the top of his created tower, and Dream lifted up an arm. Then Ranboo leapt.

The boy fell through the air. He wasn’t glowing. Dream’s heart leapt to his throat. Instinctively the Admin searched his inventory for a soft block. The closest he had was a stack of wool, and two inventory slots over he had a stack of oak planks. He set down one of his many crafting tables, grabbed three pieces of black wood and three of the planks, and crafted a bed. He threw it out under where Ranboo would land. The boy pulled a boat as he nearly landed on the bed. The boat and boy bounced and fell into a pile next to the bed.

Both the enderman hybrid and Admin froze and stared at each other. Ranboo blinked heterochromatic eyes from under the rim of an overturned boat.

“You can land on beds?” the boy asked.

“...” Dream opened his mouth and failed to speak. He nodded.

“Huh. I didn’t know that,” Ranboo said as he tilted the boat off his head and back before storing it. “Why’d you do that?”

Dream shrugged and kept his trembling hands under his cloak.

“...why didn’t you gapple before falling?”

“We’re running low,” Ranboo said blankly. He kept staring at Dream. “I had it down at this point, so I thought that’d it be a waste of resources.”

“Makes sense,” Dream said. Ranboo’s face remained blank. Dream fought down the urge to fidget.

“You were worried?” Ranboo said. Dream didn’t move. Ranboo said more firmly, “Ender says you were worried.”

“Do you believe him?” Dream said, tilting his mask. Ranboo’s gaze didn’t move from Dream. Slowly, he nodded.

“I think so,” said Ranboo. His tail twitched, and his gaze slipped away from Dream and to the bed. “Can you do that boat trick with a bed?”

“As far as I know, no,” Dream said. “You have to set a bed from the ground.”

“Too bad,” Ranboo said. “It was a fun landing. It bounced.”

“I found out about the boat with lots of research and experimentation,” Dream confessed. “Would you...want to see if you can use a bed instead of a boat?”

“Wouldn’t that be insanely hard?”

“It should be.”

“Can I try?”

“After I do,” said Dream, breaking the bed and storing it. “And only if you grab a gapple.”

“Are you going to use one?”

“No.”

“But what if you miss?”

“I won’t.”

“You won’t?” Ranboo said, skepticism that resembled a certain piglin hybrid deepening his voice further. “How can you be so sure?”



“Because I am that good,” Dream said with curved lips behind a straightened mask. Ranboo stared at him again and then broke into a grin.

“Sure you are,” Ranboo said. “But I won’t use one if you don’t.”

“You’re not me,” said Dream.

“Yep. Which means I *could* fall to a canon death, and then you’ll have to face Techno and Niki’s wrath,” Ranboo said smugly. Red and green eyes gained an annoying gleam. “You wouldn’t want that, would you?”

“I can take Techno,” Dream huffed, even as his lips quirked up further. They stared at each other, and Dream let out a heaving sigh. “But Niki...she’s terrifying. Gapples and then we’ll find out if we can MLG bed.”

“If you insist,” Ranboo smirked. Dream sighed more genuinely, but a smile hid behind his mask.

“I am going to regret this.”

---

The bread tasted like dirt. Dream blamed Ranboo. Mostly. Niki was the one that had gotten him used to more than basic bread and then taken it away because “idiots who risked their lives to bounce on beds didn’t deserve her cooking.” Not that she didn’t have a point, but they had been using gapples! At least, until she happened to come out. Dream hadn’t need one at that point.

“Enjoying your dinner?” asked an obnoxious voice from across the library table. Dream took a large bite of his bread and kept his eyes on the ones and zeros in front of him. “Mine’s pretty good.”

He instinctively glanced at Techno's plate. A sandwich made with Niki-baked bread and a slice of pumpkin pie. Gritting his teeth, he took another large bite of the dirt-based bread. Techno grunted, making Dream's teeth squeeze tight enough to hurt. A snort followed, and Dream shut his book loudly.

"What is your problem?"

"Me? I don't think I'm the one with the problem, teletubby," Techno said. He nibbled delicately at his sandwich. Dream put his book on his stack and stood.

"I'm going to check on Peace."

"You should sit and finish your dinner first," said Techno as he took the tiniest bite of his. Dream shoved the rest of the dirt bread in his mouth.

"Thwerde. Do'e," said Dream through a full mouth. Techno wrinkled his nose, and Dream stuck a tongue full of bread at him.

"Disgusting," Techno groaned. "Who taught you manners? A zombie?"

"Pea'th 'as a goot deache,'" Dream managed. He swallowed. "Better than Phil."

"In case you're implying what I think you're implying," Techno said, his words growing sharp. "My mother was the one who taught me manners, like not talking with your mouth full."

"If you say so," Dream said dismissively. He moved towards the door.

"She was human, you know."

“I know how hybrids work, Techno,” said Dream almost out of the library.

“A zombie killed her.”

Dream halted.

“He bit her, turned her, and Phil had to put her down,” Techno said. He took another bite of his sandwich, chewing slowly before continuing. “It’s how Phil and I met.”

“...how old were you?” Dream whispered.

“17,” Techno answered. “I already had quite the reputation on Hypixel. When I saw what he did, I kinda took it out on him.”

“He’s not dead.” Dream turned to fully watch the piglin hybrid. Techno shrugged, his gaze still on the wall opposite the door.

“Phil’s tougher than he looks.” Techno chewed on more of his sandwich. Mouth empty, he turned to Dream. “He had a sword to my neck, but he kept pushing me down when I lunged at him instead of running me through.”

“...oh,” Dream realized.

“A baby zombie ended Phil’s run on one of his worlds,” Techno said, his face crinkling into a frown. “I hate the things.”

“Peace was a baby zombie piglin,” Dream defended.

“He was,” said Techno. “It’s why I didn’t have a problem with him. Phil wouldn’t have either if it wasn’t for that stunt you pulled.”

“...you were out for blood.”

“You poisoned us.”

“I gave you food laced with weakness. You all recovered fine.”

“Tommy didn’t.”

“...since when do you care about Tommy?”

“Eh. He was annoying,” Techno said. Another bite of the sandwich, another shrug. “He meant something to Wilbur, and so he meant something to Phil. Plus he was a kid in trouble.”

“An orphan.”

“Phil basically adopted him on sight.”

“...he had that affect,” Dream said, a strained bitterness slipping into the words. He shook his head and exited the library.

“Hey nerd!” Techno called. Dream bit back a groan and looked over his shoulder at the piglin hybrid. A pie slammed into his face. Through the gunk of sweet brown, Dream could make out Techno’s smug expression. “Thought I’d share.”

Dream wiped at the brown gunk and held a glop of it in his hand. He shoved it into his mouth. The varied sweet and spicy flavors melded wonderfully on Dream’s tongue and drove

all memory of the dirt-based bread.

“D’anks,” Dream said through a mouth of pumpkin goo. He even lifted his mask so the piglin hybrid could see his mouth. He pulled more gunk from his hair and stuck it in his uncovered mouth. “Id ih goot.”

Disgust contorted Techno’s face, and the piglin hybrid looked away. With a pleased hum, Dream headed to the fields.

---

The mask tilted down and faced the plain bread on the plate before it.

“Eat up,” Niki grinned, her eyes glittering with what could only be malice.

“What about Peace?” Dream asked, hoping for something more to be added to the plate. After all, Peace didn’t mind plain dirt-based bread. He’d eat anything (and so would Dream once).

“Oh, I already gave him breakfast,” said Niki.

“The beds were necessary research,” Dream said, trying a different tack. “And I did not allow Ranboo to try them until I could land on them ten times in a row.”

“And how were the beds necessary research?” Niki asked sweetly. Dream quivered. “You know, necessary enough that it was worth risking your lives over?”

“I wouldn’t let Ranboo or Ender lose even one,” Dream argued.

“And yours?”

“I have all three.” Dream gave a one-shoulder shrug. “It’s not a problem.”

“It’s not a—” Niki started to repeat before throwing her hands in the air and then slapping them over her face and groaning. She popped back up and glared at Dream. “You are our Admin. Our last hope against the Egg. We can’t risk losing you.”

A painful and familiar twist dug in Dream’s chest. He nodded and took the bread. A hand stopped it from reaching his mouth.

“Wait. I didn’t mean—” Niki struggled. She grabbed the bread and stored it. Another fluffier, warm loaf replaced it in Dream’s hand. “I don’t want to see any of you hurt.”

The loaf sat in Dream’s hand, and his fingers soaked in its warmth. The herbal scent wafted up through his mask, but he was distracted from it by the hand still wrapped around his wrists.

“It scares me,” Niki spoke, her voice low and hoarse. “How little you value your life.”

Dream froze.

“I...I heard you tell Techno to kill you,” she continued. “And when I saw you leaping off that tower and falling into the ground below—I thought—” Pink hair fluttered back and forth as the woman shook her head. “But you weren’t, were you?”

“No,” Dream answered, his own voice near silent. Questions clogged his throat and mind. Why did she care? Would it be easier? Was it strange to consider—? Did it really matter if he wanted to or not? Who cared?

“Good,” said Niki. Her grip tightened and then disappeared. She grinned with both lips quirked oddly. “Because Ender and Ranboo would be very upset if you...suddenly left. And

Peace would be devastated.”

“And you?” Dream asked, the question bursting out among dozens. He instantly wanted to retract it. Niki’s odd grin curved into a softer one.

“Okay. Looks like I’m going to have to spell it out,” she said with several notes of exasperation. Niki motioned with her hand. “Come here.”

Dream took a step forward uncomfortably close to her personal space. With a huff, Niki stepped forward fully into Dream’s personal space and yanked him down by his cloak’s collar. Purposefully, she knocked her forehead against the top of Dream’s mask.

“I can’t lose anyone else, okay?” Niki whispered before pulling away. Dream’s face burned behind the mask, and his chest glowed warmth. He tampered both reactions down. She didn’t know what it meant. She was copying Peace. She wanted him to care so that he would do what she wanted. (~~But if she had heard what he said to Techno, then wouldn’t it be better to deal with the someone who already cared?~~) “Hey, SMP to Dream. SMP to Dream. You there?”

He took a step back and managed to strangle in a breath. Swallowing he opened his mouth. A sharp, hitching intake of breath, and he snapped it shut. She didn’t mean it. It meant nothing. These people didn’t—he could let himself be fooled by—why were his eyes burning? No. NO!

“Dream?” Niki asked softer. In one fluid, quick motion, Dream spun and strode out of the kitchen. His steps quickened, and his stride lengthened as he ran out of the house. He pushed past a wide-eyed Ender holding a squeaking Peace. He ignored them.

His steps pounded almost loud enough to match his heart, and his breaths hitched even as they struggled to increase their intake. With perfect timing, he stretched an arm and caught the lowest branch of the only tree in his barrier. In seconds he had reached the top. The slight shimmer of the barrier shone a couple dozen blocks ahead. The semi-transparent blocks allowed Dream a view of the broken snow wall and the red vines tangled outside it. They didn’t dare come close anymore.

Is his experience as Admin why they were trying to ingratiate themselves to him? Was that why Ranboo had asked for lessons? Why Niki baked for him. Why Techno had said what he'd said in the library. They wanted him to care. But...why were they even—? (~~Why was it working?~~)

He wouldn't. He wouldn't care. Not beyond his responsibility as Admin. They were his people, but he couldn't—they weren't his friends. ~~Monsters didn't have friends.~~ He'd fallen into that trap before.

“Dream?” said a voice from under the tree. He didn't look down. ~~He didn't want to fall.~~ “Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean—I asked Techno why you kept bumping Peace's head. Peace makes such a big deal about making sure to do it several times a day, and I was curious. And Techno said you did it because you're family. That Piglins do that with their passel. I guess I thought—You don't consider us your passel, your family. But we—me and Ranboo—we think you're part of ours. Part of the Syndicate, for all that is was founded by Techno and Phil. So I wanted—I thought it would be the best way to show you.”

Her breath sounded ragged to Dream's sensitive ears, and Dream snuck a peak downwards. She wasn't looking up at him. Her head bent towards the fields away from the barrier. (The fields they had spent several hours working on.)

“But I must have misunderstood—I never meant to cross a line. I wanted—you have come to mean a lot to us, Dream.”

Her head rose, and brown eyes met green.

“But you don't believe us.”

“What do you want?” Dream demanded as he tilted his mask and glowered at her. “You have the safety of my home. I am working on a solution to rid the server of the Egg. Both Techno and Phil have been returned to you. What else do you want?”

“What do you think we want?” she asked.



“A piece of my home to yourselves? For me to drop my guard to make it easier to take all I have? A reason to betray me and look like the heroes doing it? Like everyone else on this server has done?”

“Not everyone,” Niki said. “Puffy—”

“Puffy only ever saw me as a cute project. Did she even try to find me once I disappeared?”

“No, but she would have. George and Sapnap—”

“Sent messages for three days and then quit trying to reach me because I said I hated them,” Dream said, his voice rising. “At least this time it was because of something I said.”

“This time—?” Niki started in confusion.

“You know who did come to find me? Bad. Why? Because the Egg wanted to know where I was. If I could be swayed to its side. At least it is honest and obvious with its intentions. It does not talk to me about my child and then informs with her friends about my possible weakness. Friends who would all rather see me dead if I wasn’t the only hope to wiping the Egg of this server.”

“I didn’t mean to—”

“You are right. Peace is my passel and no one else,” said Dream. He leapt of the tree and made to dig down and hide underground for a while.

“Enough!” Niki huffed loud enough to startle Dream. She grabbed his arm and held before he could break a single block. “What happened?! What happened to the Dream that let us on the server in the first place? Don’t tell me Wilbur and L’Manberg were the cause of this—this—persecution complex. No one has betrayed you. Wilbur wanted his country, and he caused all

of us a multitude of problems because of it, but he didn't hurt you *specifically*. *You* were the one who betrayed Pogtopia. You were the one who after the L'Manberg/Pogtopia war decided to up and disappear. You were the one who left your friends, not the other way around. What happened to you?!"

Dream ripped his arm out of her grip and pulled it back as his hand gripped into a fist. Brown eyes widened, and Niki's hands sprang to cover her face. Dream stumbled backwards and jerked his arm down. (~~Monster.~~)

"Nothing you need to know," Dream said softly. He took another step back. "Don't worry about me. Or Peace. We'll take care of ourselves, including our own meals. You can have the house. I'll build another."

The hands shot out and grabbed his arm again before he could even take a step.

"No," Niki said, her voice lower and hard. "You—you're coming back with me now, and I'm making you a proper dinner with real bread. I don't care if I'm not part of your passel. You are part of mine. I don't—you can keep what happened to yourself, but please, don't push us away."

The fingers gripping Dream's arms tightened, and the brown eyes wavered and watered. She pressed her forehead onto Dream's shoulder.

"Please."

Dream's hand lifted and hovered over the pink hair brushing against his cloak. The hand clenched and jerked down to Dream's side.

"Steak."

"What?" Niki murmured. She took her head off his shoulder, revealing red-rimmed eyes.

“I would like steak,” he repeated. The fingers around his bicep loosened.

“Sounds good,” she replied with wobbly smile. She tugged him in the direction of the house.  
“Steak it is.”

Dream let her pull and followed her back into the house. He would let her think he cared.

It was safer that way.

---

Little squeaks turned to squeals as Dream swung his tiny piglin into his lap. Peace snuggled in Dream’s hold and tucked his bunny under his small chin.

“Did he behave?” said Dream as he closed the book he had been writing in and moved his mask to the side. He knocked his forehead against a happily squealing Peace.

“He’s a sweet little one,” came the reply. Dream slid the mask back into place. Ranboo looked over Dream’s shoulder and away from his mask. “...do you like us, Dream?”

Dream tilted his head automatically.

“Ender and me,” Ranboo clarified.

Dream hummed. How did he answer that? Ender was Dream’s, was the server’s. He had only ever done as Dream asked despite his lighter side. But that lighter side? Ranboo? So easily swayed. So quick to make judgements on people. Choosing people, not sides, he claimed. A good excuse to be on no one’s side but your own.

But Ranboo's side did include others. People who had gained Ranboo's trust. People who had shown themselves to be people (~~not monsters~~). Ranboo was young, much younger than Ender who was born with an old soul. And this server was not a good place to grow (and who's fault was that?).

Dream glanced into his inventory and at a newly made bed.

"Sorry," the boy muttered. He took a few small steps backwards toward the door. He nearly stepped on his tail. "I—it's okay. Please pretend—I didn't ask. You don't need to answer."

Peace squealed and snorted as he stretched out his arms towards Ranboo. Ranboo stopped, his red and green eyes flittered to the baby piglin's grasping hands and then to the air above Dream's shoulder. Peace gave an irritated snort. Ranboo twitched and then leaned forward. Peace grabbed the enderman hybrid's face and slammed his forehead into Ranboo's. Ranboo winced.

"Boo," Peace squeaked. He peeked up at Dream with white eyes full of smiles. He giggled. "Boo ours?"

Red and green eyes dared to flicker up to Dream's mask before flinching and looking down at the sharp hands digging into dual-colored cheeks. Dream shifted his grip and gently tugged Peace away from Ranboo. The baby piglin squirmed and refused to let go of Ranboo's face.

"Boo! 'Boo ours!" Peace squeaked and cried.

"Peace, you are hurting 'Boo," Dream grumbled, prying tiny fingers from thin cheeks. The bunny dropped to the floor.

"Our 'Boo! OURS!" Peace near screeched. Dream managed to release Ranboo from the tiny sharp grasp. "NO! 'Boo!"

“You have to be careful,” Dream scolded, holding the sharp hands and keeping them away from Ranboo. “You were hurting your ’Boo.”

“No! Our ‘’Boo!” Peace cried and squealed. Dream’s lips opened and then twisted under his mask. The tiny piglin squealed out sobs and struggled in Dream’s hold. He was going to fall.

“ $\Delta\omega \Delta\rightsquigarrow \textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}\rightsquigarrow\}$ ,  $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}\Lambda\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}_{\Lambda}\omega$ ,” chittered Ender, eyes fully focused on the stilling piglin. “ $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}\}$  $\overline{\Phi}$   $\Delta\}$   $\Delta\omega \Delta\rightsquigarrow \textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}\rightsquigarrow \textcolor{brown}{\text{J}}\Delta\overline{\Phi}\Xi\omega\rightsquigarrow$ ”

Tiny squeaky hiccups bounced the tiny piglin body.

“Enner?” Peace asked. Ender nodded. “’Boo sad?”

“ $\Xi\omega \textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}\}$ ,” Ender hissed, his gaze raising to Dream’s mask. He straightened and leaned forward. He brushed the side of his mask with his cheek. “ $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}\Lambda'\overline{\Phi}$   $\Delta\Lambda\}$  $\Delta\omega\rightsquigarrow \Xi\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}\}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}\text{N}\omega\}$  $\overline{\Phi}\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}_{\text{O}}\Lambda$ .”

“ $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}^{\Lambda}\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}_{\Delta} \textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}^{\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}}\omega \textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}_{\text{O}}\text{N}$ ,  $\omega\Lambda\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}\omega\rightsquigarrow$ ,” Dream hissed back.

“ $\Delta\Lambda\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}^{\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}}\Xi\overline{\Phi}\omega\rightsquigarrow \Xi\Delta\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{J}}?$ ” Ender asked.

Dream took a subtle breath and straightened his shoulders.

“ $\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}^{\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}}\omega \Xi\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}$   $\Delta\}$   $\Delta\omega\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{U}}$ .” The lie tasted like truth, which made it easier to continue with them. To lie to his dearest ally. “ $\Xi\omega \textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}\}$   $\Delta$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}_{\text{O}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}$   $\textcolor{brown}{\text{O}}^{\textcolor{brown}{\text{I}}}\textcolor{brown}{\text{H}}$ .”

“ $\overline{\Phi} \Delta \infty_{\omega} \circ \gamma \gamma \vdash \square \neg$   $\mathfrak{h} \Delta \{ \infty \Delta \wedge \Phi \cup U U \sqsubseteq i \mathfrak{h} \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi}$ ,” Ender screeched softly. The green and red eyes rounded, and the straight shoulders slumped. He added in a hiss, “ $\neq U \cup \Delta \{ \omega$ . ”

Another breath, and Dream move his mask to the side. They needed to think he cared. It was safer. (He didn't.) He gazed straight into the red and green eyes.

“I like you, 'Boo. You're a good kid.”

The enderman hybrid's slouch deepened, and the red and green eyes skittered.

“Re—really?” Ranboo said, his voice going up with a squeak in the middle of the word. Dream’s lips curled.

“And you’re a quick learner,” said Dream as he casually leaned back. “Besides now we both know how to bounce back from a fall.”

The enderman hybrid groaned. His gaze fell to the floor, and he quickly perked up. He picked up the bunny that still lay splayed under Dream's chair. Ranboo placed the bunny back in Peace's arms.

“Here, little one,” Ranboo said lightly. He peeked up at Dream’s uncovered face and then bent to brush his cheek against Peace’s. He whispered quietly, as if trying to keep the words from Dream. “Thank you.”

“Boo,” Peace squealed and wrapped his arms around Ranboo’s neck. Dream rolled his eyes and extracted Ranboo from Peace’s hold again. The tiny piglin gave much less resistance this time. Peace gave Dream a wide smile instead. “Our ’Boo.”

“Yes,” Dream said. He gave the tiny piglin a squeeze. “Our ’Boo.”



He could pretend for a little longer.

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A snout pushed itself over his shoulder. Dream glared at the offending face as it neared the book in his hand.

“Found anything interesting?” asked Techno.

“If I had, I would tell you,” Dream said, pushing the large hybrid away from his personal space.

“Yeah, eventually. Why not you tell me now?”

“I will tell you when you need to know.” He had barely gotten the snout away from his shoulder.

“Bruh,” Techno grunted. “We both know that’s code for you’ll never tell me.”

“I will tell you. But I am not going to find anything with you breathing down my neck,” said Dream. His fingers splayed across the annoying piglin face and shoved.

“Come on, don’t be like that. We’re friends, aren’t we?” Techno said as his face pushed back.

“No, we’re not,” Dream grunted, shoving harder. “Why are you like this?”

“Like what?” the piglin hybrid dared to ask in an innocent tone. Dream dropped his book and shifted his stance so that he could elbow the annoying man’s sternum. A large, thick-skinned



hand grabbed the side of Dream's head, almost knocking off the smiling mask, and attempted to push. Dream slipped his head down under the grasping hand and made to headbutt the idiot's chin. The large hand grabbed the back of his cloak and interrupted his momentum.

A cough stopped Dream's foot from coming down hard on the other's nearest toes.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your...research," said Niki from her position in the library's entrance. "But have you seen a baby piglin anywhere?"

"What happened?" Dream demanded as he stepped away from the idiot piglin hybrid. Techno snorted, but he didn't push back into Dream's personal space.

"Ender said that Ranboo was playing with him in his room when they started a game of hide-and-seek. Ranboo did say that they had to stay in the house, so he thought it'd be okay. But it's been half an hour, and he can't find him. Ranboo panicked, so Ender came to find me. I thought it'd be best to tell you."

Dream had stilled as he took in the explanation. Ranboo should have come to him. (But how could he blame the boy? He had made himself terrifying even to those on his side.) He vaguely wondered why Ender hadn't. But he could ask the enderman half later. Peace wouldn't willfully break rules, so his disappearance made no sense. Unless—

"Did the alert for Phil go off?" Dream asked, turning to face Techno. The piglin hybrid shifted, and Dream's stomach dropped. (~~Why did they always do this? Demand from him what they won't give?~~) His hands clenched. "When?"

"Yesterday," came the answer from the doorway. Niki did not look at him. "Techno thought—We thought it would be best to tell you when he was more...lucid."

Dream's lips pressed tight together. The act lasted less than he thought. At least the game was over. And Ender's true allegiance was revealed. (~~Was it?~~) The enderman hybrid could have—No. Later. Now Peace.

Dream strode out the library, brushing past Niki. She cried out, spoke, said words. But he registered them as the meaningless noise that they were. With a practiced motion, he summoned and placed barrier blocks in the hall behind him and climbed the stairs. If Peace could not be found in his regular places, then there is only one place he could be.

With no resistance, Dream reached the door to Ranboo's old room. The specially coded barrier blocks gone. Slamming the door open, Dream twirled Nightmare into his hand. Barrier blocks stacked behind him guided by his free hand. Blue eyes widened at his entrance and narrowed at the weapon in his hand.

"Where is he?" Dream hissed. Black wings twitched, fully functional, behind the man sitting on the bed.

"Where is who?" asked Phil, his words sharp as any sword.

Dream grunted, and a small head poked out from behind black feathers. A squeal that ended in a grunt had Peace exiting the feathered curtain and scrambling to Dream. Arms in green sleeves grabbed the baby piglin by the middle and held the tiny body against a broad chest.

"Let him go," Dream hissed again. Blue eyes flickered to something behind Dream, but Dream didn't look back.

"Techno?" Phil whispered, his arms loosening their grip. Peace immediately squiggled out of the circle of arms and scrambled to Dream. Dream scooped him up and hid him in his cloak. Blue eyes yanked themselves towards him at the sudden motions. "What—Who was that?"

"None of your concern," Dream said, turning around and removing the barrier blocks.

"Wait!" Phil called. Dream ignored him. "Dream?"

Pushing past the two in the entrance, Dream headed to his own room. He dropped a quivering Peace onto the bed. Grunting firmly, he then turned and exited the room. Taking firm steps,

he went down the stairs and out of the house. Sharp fingers dug into his shoulder.

“Where are you going?”

Dream yanked his shoulder out of the sharp grip and had his mask glare at the pig-headed idiot.

“I am going to rid the server of the Egg.”

“How?” Techno demanded. As if he had the right to.

“Does it matter?”

“Will it kill Phil?”

“Does it matter?” Dream repeated. Techno’s nose flared.

“You know it does,” Techno growled.

“So does me having full knowledge of our situation, but that didn’t matter,” Dream snapped and hissed. His nails bit into his palms. “If you want me out of the way, I already told you how. Kill me.” ~~Don’t pretend my life matters to you.~~ “Then you and yours can have full run of the server.” ~~Release me fully from my responsibility. From this horrid charade.~~ “And you can protect Phil and the others however you want.” ~~And maybe find a better way than mine.~~

“We were going to tell you about Phil,” Techno huffed, but like Niki he didn’t look at Dream. “But we wanted him to be more awake before—”

“Don’t lie!” Dream yelled. The volume scraped and burned in his throat. He heaved in cool breaths. They soothed his throat and the burn pooling in his eyes. “Just stop. Either kill me and take my job or leave me alone and let me do it.”

“There’s something wrong with Phil!” Techno burst. His own chest heaved. His blood red eyes fell tiredly onto Dream’s mask. “Considering you’ve stated that you’d be fine killing him, I wasn’t in a hurry to tell you. Plus there was the fact that he—”

“I don’t kill except as a last resort,” Dream interrupted, his shoulders bunching against his ears. He straightened them.

“Tell that to Tommy.”

“Of course,” Dream sagged. “Just let me do my job.”

“I can’t,” Techno said, his eyes slipping away from the mask. The Orphan Obliterator appeared in his sharp hand. “Not if it hurts Phil.”

“For him, the world,” Dream echoed softly. And again, he was against it.

“Techno,” came a voice behind Dream. Dream dared a glance to his side and caught sight of pink hair. “We’ve done enough.”

“Niki,” Techno gasped. He took a half-step back. “What are you doing?”

“He’s protected and sheltered us, Tech,” Niki continued. A flash of light reflected in her hand. Dream turned to look. She held a hoe. “He saved you from the Egg, even when it hurt him. Even after what Phil did. He’s...he can keep doing it. But he needs to know what is going on. Fighting him isn’t going to help.”

“We’re not,” Techno defended. His sword lowered as he gestured to Dream. “But I can’t let him kill Phil.”

“He isn’t trying to kill Phil!” Niki said. She stood right next to Dream, and Dream stared at her. “He’s trying to save the server!”

“He can do that without harming Phil!” Techno said, his monotone shifting and growing agitated. “He can.”

“Then we need to be honest with him,” Niki grit. “No more hiding the truth about Phil, no matter what happens. Like you said, he can help. He can handle it.”

Techno growled and grabbed his head.

“Oh no,” Niki gasped. Dream blinked, and the world became highlighted in code. White code slipped into pink from various directions. Dream tried to follow the path of one, but the origin looked like it came from outside the server. How?

Dream stepped forward and grabbed a piece of the white speeding code.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEE! screeched in through his head.

Immediately he let it go. What was that? Were a multitude of those rushing through Techno’s mind? Bodily Dream jumped into the piglin hybrid’s space. He set his hands against the sides of Techno’s head. The speeding white code tried to slip between his fingers, but he wove ones and zeros of his own. Green code formed a helmet around Techno’s head, and the various white codes slammed into it.

Blood red eyes stared straight into Dream, into his code, and he jerked back.

“How did you do that?” asked a stunned piglin hybrid.

“It’s a modification of what I plan to do with the Egg,” said Dream. He studied the way the white code tried to slip past his hastily constructed firewall. He didn’t look at Techno’s face. “Unfortunately the Egg is more clever than whatever this code is.”

The white code appeared to take offense to Dream’s word as it (they?) resumed their assault on the green spun code. Some of it (them?) managed to remove a bit of the outer layer of code.

“They’re quiet,” Techno said, his voice low and breathing soft. Surprise (awe) had stretched and bent his face in a way that Dream had never seen. “How did you do that?”

“I answered that,” Dream said as he backed away from the piglin hybrid’s hard stare. He fluttered a hand in the direction of the stubborn white code(s?). “What are those?”

“Chat,” Techno said, his voice monotone and his face falling back to its default flat state. “They’re obnoxious, but still, this is going to cost me channel members. I’m going to have to ask you to undo whatever you did.”

“You want that...back?” Dream asked. The white code swirled around Techno’s head.

“I don’t expect you to understand,” Techno said, crossing his arms. “But they’ll be worse once they get through whatever you did. Plus you’re losing me money.”

“Money...?” Dream whispered. He examined the white code. They didn’t look like they could be changed into commands for diamond blocks or netherite. “Are you certain they aren’t...affecting your thought processes?”

“You mean are they driving me insane? Because if you are, then yes. They are most certainly driving me insane. But they are vital to my character, so please return them. Plus they are what keep me immune to the Egg.”

“You’re immune to the Egg?”

“You know you’re asking a lot of questions, but you aren’t fixing my money problem. At this rate, I’ll have to use our quickly diminishing resources to make myself a bell. I don’t think you want me to do that.”

“A bell...?” Dream echoed. The white code had somehow formed a harmless(?) tornado above Techno’s protected code. Blinking, Dream switched back to “seeing” the world as it was. The piglin hybrid stood on the grass in front of the house looking cross. Why hadn’t Dream checked the man’s code before? “What is wrong with you?”

“That is a list I don’t think anyone knows for sure. Are you going to let them back in or what?”

“What are you two talking about?” asked Niki. She’d stepped forward and slightly in-between them.

“Code,” Dream answered half-focused. His mask met Techno’s hard gaze. “Are they hurting you?”

“Not really,” Techno said with a shrug.

“That’s not what it looked like earlier.”

“They were being a bit...overeager. They are arguably more protective of Phil than I am. And they are honestly not fond of you.”

“Oh,” Dream said. He stared at the empty air above Techno. His lips pressed together. Did they—no. Enough was enough. “I’ll return them if you stay here and let me get rid of the Egg.”

“Look, we all want to be rid of that undone omelet,” Techno said, his hand wiping down his face. “But I cannot let you kill Phil.”

“Why? Because of that weird code?”

“No. Because Phil is my friend, and I don’t let bad things happen to my friends if I can help it.”

“The Egg is a bad thing,” said Dream. “And it has a hold on him.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Techno said, his voice rising slightly. “Phil...he’s fighting it. He isn’t influenced. Something else is wrong.”

Dream tilted his head and turned to Niki. Niki nodded in one quick jerk.

“His eyes aren’t red,” she said. She faced Dream fully. “He’s just...not thinking straight.”

“It did something to his code,” Techno added. A growl vibrated through his voice. “It couldn’t fully take him, so it...scrambled something in his head.”

“Scrambled?” Dream repeated. Techno glared, and Dream nodded. “Show me.”

Techno glanced to the right of Dream at Niki, and Dream saw her nod out of the corner of his eye. The piglin hybrid huffed and then grunted. He headed back towards the house.

Niki stepped into Dream’s space and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “For hearing us out.”



Dream shrugged her hand off his shoulder and had his mask face her. Were they going back to pretending? (~~Why did they always expect him to pretend everything was okay after they messed up?~~)

“I haven’t done anything yet.”

The charade wasn’t over, but he wasn’t sure he could pretend any longer.

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Phil was fully sitting up in bed when they returned. Techno had sat himself by the bed, and Phil’s hand had settled on his head in the circle of his crown. Blue eyes vaguely followed their movement as they entered.

“Where’s Ranboo?” Dream asked.

“Still hiding probably,” Techno answered. “He’s scared you—”

“I don’t want to hear it,” Dream interrupted. He didn’t want to hear about the boy that had called him family, had kept up the charade past his fear, had convinced Ender—Deal with Phil. Deal with the Egg. And leave the server. He couldn’t—Staying here had been a mistake he wouldn’t be making thrice. He focused on the old Admin on the bed. “I am going to look at your code.”

“Dream?” Phil asked. His face twisted in confusion. “I thought—How? What are you doing—how did you escape the prison?”

Ender Translation:

[illegible]

☯⊆△∞∞ ≠ ∅∏. - Thank you.

$$\wedge_{\underline{0}} \neq \vee_{\underline{0}} \perp \underline{L}^{\Psi \upharpoonright}, \text{ - No problem,}$$

$\wedge \underline{\circ} \text{ } \sigma \underline{\circ} \underline{\circ} [\ ]? - \text{No good?}$

人〇 〇〇〇〇, - No good,

$\triangle \nabla \wedge \overline{\bigcirc} \triangle \frac{1}{\equiv} \times \cup \triangle \infty ?$  - Want a break?

$\hbar \int \sigma \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \quad \frac{\hbar}{\psi} \triangle \quad \sigma \subseteq \square \quad \int \square \psi \triangle$  - Might be a good idea

$\ominus \circ \circ \triangle \nmid \cdot \cdot \triangle \wedge \perp \ominus \ominus \triangle \triangle \wedge \overline{\Phi} \Psi \boxplus \overline{\Phi} \ominus \overline{\Phi} \triangle \nabla \circ \overline{\Phi} \ominus \nmid \ominus \sqcap$ , - Okay. Ranboo wanted to talk to you,

$\Delta\psi \nabla \nabla \psi \nabla \nabla \psi, \nabla \nabla \psi \nabla \nabla \psi, -$  We are yours, young one,

†‡{̄Φ} Δ{ Δω Δ↗ω ≠ ∅‡ Δ̄Φ ⊆ ω↗}. - Just as we are your father's.

⊆ ∪ {,} - He is,

፳፻፲፱ ጠየቅህ 'ቅ ለእኛ ልሰው ። - You didn't answer his question.

𐎧𐏁𐎢𐎠 𐎡𐏁𐎢𐎠 𐎤𐎢𐎵𐎶𐎠 𐎥𐎢𐎴𐎶𐎠 𐎧𐏁𐎢𐎠, 𐎦𐎠𐎭𐎠𐎶𐎠, - You know i like you, ender,

$\triangle \wedge \cap \nmid \neq U \circ \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \Psi \propto \subseteq \triangle U \mathcal{J}$ ? - And my lighter half?

I like him as well.

☐ω ⓘ} ⚡ ⓪⓪⓪⓪ ⓪⓪⓪⓪. - He is a good kid.

$\overline{\Phi} \Delta \circ \omega \circ \sigma \sigma \neq \sigma \tau \rightarrow \Delta \{ \circ \Delta \wedge \Phi \overline{\Phi} \omega \omega \omega \subseteq i \Delta \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi} \}$ , - Take off your mask and tell him that,

$\neq L_{\Psi} \triangle \{ \Psi \}$ . - Please.

$\nVdash_{\mathcal{M}} \perp_{\mathcal{M}} \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Delta \times \Psi \mathrel{\mathcal{M}} \times \}$ , - You both are ours,

# Backstory Unlocked (And Everyone is Unhappy with the Result)

## Chapter Summary

Phil talks too much. Dream struggles to get away from everything. And yet progress is made. Maybe.

## Chapter Notes

Bit busy IRL. I'll try to update a bit faster whenever possible. Even if only a little bit.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream jerked back. What?

Blue eyes widened.

“You know what I’m talking about,” Phil said, *relief* in his tone. “Where are we? I don’t recognize these coordinates. The last thing I remember is Techno saying he was going to break you out. Then I was laying in this strange room surrounded by barrier blocks.”

What?

Dream took a step back and nearly bumped into Niki.

“Imagine my surprise when Techno started talking about the Egg and whether I heard it in my head. I had no idea what he was talking about, so he told me to stay here and rest. Brought Niki here, but she kept talking about the Egg too. But, you see, Techno teamed up with Quackity to take the Eggpire down. Complained about having to deal with Quackity the whole time afterwards. But then somehow he killed Quackity here? Wherever here is?”

Shaking his head, Dream nearly dashed out the door. Niki grabbed his hand and stopped him.

“So you do know what he’s talking about,” Niki stated.

“Thought he might,” said Techno. He smirked. “Wasn’t sure he was ready to face someone who knows. Turns out I was right.”

Dream glared at Techno, but he let Niki’s hand steady him.

“What happened?” Phil asked, looking between Techno and Dream.

“And hey, looks like my favors are always worth something, nerd,” Techno said smugly under Phil’s hand. Dream full on scowled.

“Apparently they take months to come into effect,” Dream shot back. Phil sighed.

“All right, enough,” Phil said, taking the hand off Techno’s head long enough to knock the back of it. “I take it you remember the world as I do?”

“This is a different timeline,” Dream said. He shifted, trying to pull his hand out of Niki’s grasp. “May I look at your code?”

“My code?” Phil said, stiffening. “What does my code have to do with anything?”

“It has to be the way you remember,” said Dream. He tilted his head and then straightened it. “The Egg has shown skill when it comes to coding.”

“Makes sense. It’s a virus,” said Phil with a small bob of his head. “But what does that have to do with *my code*.”

“You’ve been exposed,” Dream said flatly. Blue eyes blinked and then stared down at the older Admin. Phil squinted before blinking again.

“What happened to my access?” Phil asked. Dream shifted. His mask turned to Techno. Techno huffed.

“You gave it to me,” Techno grunted, bumping Phil’s hand on his head and gaining his attention. “I can give it back.”

Dream felt himself frowning. Phil would be a better partner for the research necessary to defeat the Egg. And Techno...wasn’t trustworthy. No matter what Phil said. (Not that Phil was trustworthy. Not until Dream checked his code.)

He wouldn’t miss the constant interruptions of the piglin hybrid’s snores, obnoxious pointed questions, or pointed comments. Finally he might actually find a solution.

Phil would definitely be the better partner.

“How exposed was I to the Egg?”

“The undone omelet touched your code,” Techno said, his words not flat but not quite a growl. “That’s why you gave me your Admin access.”

“Probably best you don’t give it back then. Not until we’re certain I’m free from the Egg’s influence,” Phil said. He hummed. “You have my permission to look at my code. Both of you. But do not touch it.”

“We won’t,” Dream said. He closed his eyes and then slowly reopened them. The man’s code glowed a forest green with gold sparkling in between large stretches. The zeros and ones wrapped tightly into the Avian’s code, but Dream could make out the hiccups of torn access. Techno grunted.

“Why’re the numbers hesitating?” the piglin hybrid said, peering through his glasses at the hiccups.

“Personal code loops around the whole space occupied by that person,” Dream explained. “My guess is that the code is trying to adjust to a loss of an important command code, like Admin access.”

“Is there any other reasons it would be doing that?”

Dream hummed and watched as the code seemed to close the hiccupping tears. Probably an instinctive reaction given Phil’s knowledge of code. There was no obvious red code.

“Large changes in code, personal or general, can cause the code to destabilize and have sudden gaps,” Dream answered. He leaned closer to look through the outer layer and into the lower layers of code. Glowing green and shining gold, brighter than before. (Maybe too bright?) “Like removal of Admin access.”

“Or an undone omelet implanting its code,” Techno said. Dream could feel the obnoxious man’s glance through his code.

“Maybe,” Dream said. He stretched a hand-shaped code at Phil. “But do you see any red code?”

“No,” Techno snorted. “But it was there before.”

“You looked at my code?” Phil asked.

“Only the top layer,” Dream said. He closed his eyes and opened them to face blue ones.  
“Nothing too deep.”

“Oh,” Phil said. “And now?”

“I don’t see anything,” Techno said. His eyes squinted through his glasses.

“Your code seems to have recovered,” Dream said. “It’s brighter. So something happened with your code, but nothing red is left.”

“So the Egg’s code, what? Left on its own?” Techno challenged.

“It is possible for a personal code, especially one belonging to an Admin, to fight off any invading code on its own,” Dream explained.

“So Phil’s good?”

A brief hesitation came over Dream, but he brushed it aside and nodded.

“That’s good to hear,” Phil said with a sigh. “So anybody want to explain why I am in a strange house with a bunch of barrier blocks surrounding my room?”

“You are in a different timeline,” Dream said.

“You’ve said that,” Phil said, his sigh repeating. Blue eyes glinted at Dream. “Try again.”

“From what I’ve gotten, Dream went back in time and let the Egg take control of the server,” Techno explained, arms raising to rest their elbows onto the bed. The full smirk on the piglin hybrid’s face had Dream clench his fists. Could he punch the idiot in the face? No. Niki would get mad. And then no good food for a week or so.

“Let the Egg take over the server? How? What did he do?” Phil asked as he glanced over at Techno who shrugged.

“That’s the thing. He didn’t do anything.”

“What? Why?” Phil continued. His glinting blue gaze froze Dream in place. “You knew the Egg was a threat. Why didn’t you take care of it early?”

“Was it?” Dream said softly. Phil opened his mouth and then pressed his lips together. He hummed and nodded.

“I guess it wasn’t. Techno and Quackity had no problem taking it down before. Pretty sure the whole Eggpire tried to stop them too. And you were in the prison at the time, so I suppose you didn’t know.”

“The Egg is the one who sent him to the past,” Techno said almost casually. “Asked for the server in exchange.”

“And you agreed?” Phil said softly. Dream stayed silent. Phil’s eyes gained softened edges. “How bad was the prison?”

“Prison?” Niki asked. She tightened her grip, reminding Dream his hand was still in hers. She stepped slightly further into his personal space. “Sorry. I didn’t want to interrupt, but you’ve mentioned a prison a couple of times now. What happened?”

“You didn’t tell them about Pandora’s Box?” Phil said to Dream. Ignoring him, Dream tried to extract himself from Niki’s tight grip, but she tightened it. Brown eyes glared into his



mask, and he looked away.

“Pandora’s Box?” Techno repeated incredulity dripping from his tone. “Dream was in a prison called Pandora’s Box? Who decided on that name?”

“Not sure,” Phil said. “Sam was the warden, but the rumor was that Dream made the prison himself.”

“*You* named it Pandora’s Box,” Techno said, his stupid mouth gaping open. Dream refused to look at anyone else in the room. He twisted his hand to loosen Niki’s hold. It didn’t work.

“Forget what it was called. *Why* was Dream in it?” Niki demanded. She added her second hand to counter Dream’s increasing struggling.

Dream tugged hard until worried brown eyes narrowed in annoyance. Niki pulled their joined hands and his attention fully back to her. She mouthed “bread.” Dream stopped and wished he had never tasted Niki’s fluffy bread.

“From what I heard, a majority of the sever put him in there for his crimes against the server,” Phil said. Techno huffed.

“I’m sure they had a just and fair trial to decide that.”

“Depends on what you consider a fair trial,” Phil said. “Does everyone present at the time deciding you deserve prison count?”

“Was I there?” Niki asked. Dream snapped towards Phil. The man seemed to catch the meaning in the movement.

“I don’t know,” Phil said with fake honesty, his gaze on the only woman in the room.

“You do,” Niki accused, her hands shaking around Dream’s. “I was there. I threw him in with the rest. What did he do?”

“Does it matter?” Techno said flatly. “He was a threat, and we’ve seen how those in L’Manberg and places like it react to *threats*.”

“Techno’s not wrong,” said Phil. “But from what others have said, Dream was trying to control the whole server using what people loved.”

“Control the whole server—?” Niki repeated. Brown eyes glared at Dream, not with anger but frustration. “Why would you do that?”

Dream did not want to continue this conversation. He hadn’t explained himself last time, and he wouldn’t this time. They didn’t need to know. They didn’t deserve to know. He wanted—needed to be left alone. He gave a twisting tug and finally freed his hand. (Niki’s grip had loosened.)

“I don’t answer to you,” Dream said, ice in his tone.

“Did it have to do with the Egg?”

Dream ignored his former rival’s question and hurried to the door. His cloak pulled him back, and Dream snatched Nightmare out of his inventory and slashed the cloth. A sword knocked Nightmare out of his hand.

“Cowardice doesn’t become you, Dream,” Techno said tonelessly. The sword dug itself in between Nightmare and Dream. “Stop running away.”

“I am a speedrunner,” Dream quipped. He judged the distance around the sword and to Nightmare. He wouldn’t leave it here to be snatched by underserving hands (~~again~~).

“Running is what I do.”

“Did you do it because of the Egg?” Phil asked hesitantly. “Were you trying to unite the server against its evils so that people would take the Egg seriously?”

“Okay, I don’t get it,” said Niki, her brown eyes flickering to Dream, but she didn’t move any closer to him. “What did trying to control the server have to do with taking down the Egg?”

“An Admin’s duty is to the server and all those who live on it,” said Phil. “Part of that duty is to make sure that everyone is living the best life possible. Taking care of problems as best as possible so that the server is peaceful and full of happy inhabitants. But when the inhabitants fight each other and destroy the server’s land, it becomes a serious problem. One could argue that it is an even more serious problem than a virus overtaking a server. The Admin has to stop it.

“I thought it was odd that Dream helped Techno and I destroy part of the server’s land all the way down to the bedrock. But if he saw L’Manberg as the cause for the unrest in the server, it makes sense. An Admin will do anything for the peace of his server. Even if it means finding leverage over every inhabitant to keep them in line and stop them from causing further harm to each other or the server. Perhaps I should have taken Wilbur’s letters a little less to their word, especially since I’ve been a server’s Admin myself. And given what I’ve seen of Tommy in particular, I can see what caused Dream to go to that extreme.”

“But what about the Egg?” Niki asked again.

“It sounds like Dream tried a Xanatos Gambit,” Techno explained, blood red eyes firm on Dream’s every movement. Uselessly because Dream couldn’t move. There was no way that the piglin hybrid had figured out what even Dream’s best friends hadn’t— “A situation where all the outcomes came out to Dream’s advantage. If he didn’t get caught gaining leverage over everyone on the server, he would have leverage against the whole server and force them to unite and likely use the Egg as their common enemy.

“He gets caught trying to control the whole server? The whole server would unite against him and throw him in the best place to keep him: a prison of his own making. And they would likely be sufficiently paranoid to take care of any other lingering threats to their newly gained peace, including the Egg.”

“I heard Quackity placed the Egg in the same prison where Dream was being kept,” Phil said as if following Techno’s logic. Logic no one had thought to follow other than Ender and Punz. And only after they were told. “So he would have the ability to take care of it.”

“Not a bad plan,” Techno said with an approving nod. His large, pig-sized head slightly tilted. “But then Quackity took advantage of your incarceration and decided to go on a power trip. Man’s always had some version of Napoleon syndrome. So when you said the Egg visited you, you mean it was locked in the prison with you.”

Air raked Dream’s dry throat, and he swallowed to ease the sensation. How? Why? No one had—He was a monster. That had always been reason enough. (He *was* a monster. ~~And no one had bothered to ask why.~~)

-

“Might have taken some effort from the Egg,” said Phil. “Given what little information you gathered before your attempt at a rescue, Dream was in solitary isolation.”

“For bad behavior?” asked Niki to Phil. But she looked at Dream. (~~Did she see a monster? Or~~  
—)

“From what we’d gathered, he’d been there from the start.”

Techno broke his gaze from Dream as quick shock and anger flashed across his features. Dream dashed, grabbed Nightmare, and ran. A call followed behind him, but he didn’t stop. He went down the hall and yanked his door open. Reflexively removing and replacing barrier blocks behind him, Dream slammed the door shut. He didn’t want to see their reactions.

(They would think he deserved it. He did. ~~Didn’t he?~~)

A hiss sounded behind him, and Dream snapped away from the door and to the bed. A tall, awkward enderman hybrid wrapped around a tiny piglin. Dream considered going back out the way he came, but he wanted to deal with the people behind him less than he wanted to deal with the enderman hybrid.

“𐀀𐀁𐀂 𐀃𐀄𐀅,” Ender hissed. Peace bobbed his head upwards to look at the tall teen surrounding him, and Ender gently patted the tiny piglin’s head. Giving a small squeak, Peace settled deeper into Ender’s hold. “𐀆𐀇𐀈 𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎𐀏𐀐 𐀑𐀒𐀓 𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗𐀘𐀙𐀚𐀛?”

“Why didn’t you tell me about Phil?” Dream hissed back.

“We alerted you,” Ender hissed. His tail swung around and forward into Peace’s lap. The tiny piglin squealed and began to play with the white tuft at the end of the long black tail. “And before you say anything else, Phil would not have hurt Peace. He was confused but fond of him. Called him my son and a strange name. Michael. Wondered where Tubbo was. He didn’t understand Ender, so my lighter self spoke for us. He probed to see what Phil remembered. He spoke of Techno’s preparations and then stopped. Wary of telling us what Techno was up to.”

Green and red eyes fell to gaze at Peace. Or away from Dream.

“My lighter self was worried. So he promised to keep the plans secrets. He figured I could tell you for both of us since his word only bound him. Phil admitted Techno was...was going to—”

A staticky growl cut off the wobbling words, and green and red eyes glowed. Peace startled and looked up again, but a large white hand covered the white eyes. Green and red eyes blinked, and the same red and green eyes flittered in the direction of his mask.

“He told us Techno had spoken to Quackity,” Ranboo continued softly. He peered at Dream but couldn’t hold the gaze too long. The white hand slipped away from Peace’s eyes and stroked the tiny skull instead. “That Techno suspected Quackity was...was up to something and either way he owed you a favor. So he would go...” The hand tensed, and the red and green eyes focused on an unspecified spot on the floor. Then suited shoulders straightened, and Ranboo looked straight into Dream’s mask. “Why were you in prison?”

“For crimes against the server,” Dream lied easily. He was to be executed not imprisoned for those so-called crimes. (He should have let them.)

“What crimes?” Ranboo asked, his pupils quivering but not leaving Dream’s mask. “Ender... Where was Ender?”

“Outside,” Dream said. His tongue tasted ash and slime. “With everyone else. No one else was in the prison.”

“He—Phil said that you’d been in prison for months.” The eyes finally slipped away from the mask but not before flashing in anger. “How—Why did Ender leave you there?”

“You and him didn’t talk,” Dream answered. “I told him to stay away.”

“And he did?” Ranboo asked, his gaze snapping back to Dream.

“He did,” Dream affirmed. Ranboo’s mouth fell open and then twisted as his eyes shone wet.

“Didn’t anyone try to go get you?” Ranboo asked. “Sapnap? Or George? Or any one of your friends? Of the people you invited to live *here*?”

Dream shrugged, and the teen started to breathe hard. His feet took a half-step forward before he realized what he was doing and forced them to stop. Sharp squeaking sounded a staccato accompaniment to the gasping breaths, and large white eyes pleaded with a loud squeal in Dream’s direction. Dream let himself hurry forward and grab the boy’s shoulders.

“He’s—it hurts,” Ranboo managed between gasps. Tears trickled down furry cheeks. “He’s hurt—I don’t think—He’s never felt like this before—Does he feel—When I—”

“𐌵𐌹𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶, 𐌲𐌴𐌺𐌷𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌰,” Dream hissed softly. He stopped his hands from leaving the boy’s shoulders to rub at wet cheeks. “𐌶𐌴𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶 𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌰𐌹𐌶 𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶.”

“𐌲𐌴𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶 𐌲𐌴𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶 𐌲𐌴𐌺𐌰𐌹𐌶,” Ender screeched. Dream grimaced as the sound assaulted his ears, and Peace covered his own. Pressing a hand on the baby piglin’s head, he reversed the command he’d discovered the other day. Hopefully the baby piglin would remain oblivious to what was said.

“What happened was not your fault,” Dream hissed, again softly. Green and red eyes would not look at him. He pulled his mask to the side and locked the heterochromatic eyes with his own green. “It was mine. It was theirs. It was not yours.”

“When you said you didn’t want to try again,” the boy hissed equally quietly back. “You meant from then?”

“Yes,” Dream admitted.

“I failed,” the boy near squeaked instead of hissed. “I didn’t help you. I’m not helping you. I’m hurti—” The boy cut himself off again.

Dream sighed, and the green and red gaze slipped away.

“Why am I still here?” came the almost too low hiss.

“Because you are ours,” Dream reminded. A half-snorted chuckle responded.

“I shouldn’t be,” the boy said in a small screech. “What good am I to you?”

“You’re likely the reason I am still here,” Dream replied. He gave a small smirk. “Who else would have convinced the server to spawn Peace in my room?”

White and black cheeks flushed red briefly.

“ $\overline{h} \overline{o} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Xi} \overline{w} \times \overline{\Delta} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{\Phi} \overline{w} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \overline{o} \overline{\Xi} \overline{w} \overline{I} \neq$ ,” Ender hissed.

“ $\{ \overline{\Xi} \overline{w} \overline{\Phi} \overline{i} \overline{\Phi}$ ,” Dream agreed. He leaned forward and pressed his cheek against Ender’s. Something settled softly in his chest. “ $\overline{h} \overline{o} \overline{\Pi} \overline{\Phi} \times \overline{w} \overline{h} \overline{i} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{w}, \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{\Phi} \overline{i} \overline{\Phi} \overline{h} \overline{h} \overline{h} \overline{o} \overline{\Pi} \times \{. \overline{\Phi} \times \overline{\Pi} \{ \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Xi} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi}$ .”

The black cheek pressed back.

“ $\overline{i} \overline{h} \{ \overline{o} \times \neq \overline{h}$ .”

“ $\overline{i} \overline{o} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{o} \overline{\Delta}$ ,” Dream drew back, his small smirk growing. “ $\overline{\Phi} \overline{o} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \overline{o} \overline{i} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \overline{o} \overline{\Phi} \overline{i} \overline{\Lambda}$ .”

“ $\overline{i} \overline{\Delta} \overline{o} \overline{\Lambda} \overline{\Phi}$ ,” Ender screeched. And then red and green eyes blinked, and Ranboo stared openly at him.

“I’ve never felt him that upset.”

Dream shrugged as he stepped back. He shouldn’t have done that. But Ender—he hadn’t betrayed him. Not really. Not even here. He was...he was family (*an attachment*). Dream couldn’t—Ender did not deserve to hurt. Not over Dream’s decisions.

“He cares about you,” Ranboo continued. He curled over Peace who had been watching quietly. The baby piglin squeaked and then blinked startled. More squeaks sounded, each more panicked and confused than the last. Dream place a hand on Peace’s head and reversed the command. The squeaks abruptly stopped and then started more calmly.





“No, no. That’s okay,” Ranbo said, the grin smaller and awkwardly perched. “I’d like to stay her if I may?”

Dream grunted, wrapped an arm around the already snuffling Peace, fully removed his mask, and closed his eyes. Best to show trust in this situation (and Ender wouldn’t let anything happen—~~maybe even Ranboo wouldn’t~~). A tiny amount of shuffling vibrated from the other side of the bed.

Something soft and furry wrapped around the wrist tucked against Peace. Dream peeked, and a white tuft had wiggled itself around his wrist, the tail attached and stretched across the bed. The enderman’s two-toned face was looking away from Dream and flushed slightly pink. The tail didn’t move.

Giving in, Dream grinned and let his fingers stroke the tuft tied to him. Oddly the motion settled him further. The earlier flutter in his chest sparked into warmth, and the warmth spread from his chest to the rest of his body. His body slumped fully into the bed.

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“Wakey, wakey. Eggs and bakey!”

Dream grumbled and pulled the small source of warmth at his side closer. He didn’t know who was making the racket, and he didn’t care. A snuffling snort blew into his ear.

“Figured that wouldn’t be enough to wake you from your beauty rest, but we’ve got a server to figure out how to save, nerd. And if you don’t get yourself up soon—”

“Lea’b himn alone, Tech’o,” another voice sluggishly defended.

“Hah? You here too Ranboo? Niki was worried when she noticed your room was empty last night.”

“How’d you not see me?” the second voice groused more coherently, and the bed bounced briefly under Dream. “I’m closer to the door than Dream is?”

“Eh. Guess I had my eyes on the prize then. Now move it,” said the first voice from way too close to Dream’s personal space. Irritated and not afraid to show it, Dream let go of the comfortable warmth, drew Nightmare out of his inventory, and made to lunge at the intruder. Only to fail when one of his wrist caught on something that had him reeling back.

The piglin hybrid widened his gaze before squinting as uproarious laughter escaped his wide mouth.

“You—you look like you’re—you’re caught on something—there, green boy,” Techno managed between unwarranted laughter. Dream scowled and pulled his wrist forward to examine it. White fur remained wrapped tightly around it.

Dream glared back at Ranboo, who sheepishly smiled from where he had been pulled further onto the bed. The teen had nearly toppled onto the tiny piglin who had somehow slept through all the movement and noise.

Clearing his throat, Dream gave a pointed look at the tail still wrapped around his wrist. Ranboo blushed and released his tail’s hold on Dream’s hand. All the while the large piglin hybrid continued to laugh loudly at their predicament. Time to put an end to that.

Lunging forward as he initially intended, Dream slashed his axe at the piglin hybrid. Still laughing, Techno barely dodged the blow, blood trickling from a cut on his chin. Another blow was instantly blocked by the warrior’s own signature weapon. The laughing had blessedly stopped, but humor remained dancing in the red eyes.

“Good morning to you too, Dream,” Techno said, smirking.

“Get out,” Dream growled. “Who let you—”

The thought cut off, and Dream glanced at where the barrier blocks had been set up. How had

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The large sword slipped out from under his axe, making Dream lose his balance momentarily. The sword then slashed in his direction, and he ducked under it. Several blond hairs fell to the floor.

“What did you do to my barrier blocks?” Dream demanded in a low tone.

“I figured out how to break through them,” Techno said smugly. Then he shrugged. “With a little help from Phil, of course.”

“Phil helped you break through my blocks,” Dream said with narrowed eyes. “How—”

“I sent you to see if you could wake him up, Techno. Not startle him into attacking!” Niki scolded from the door. Brown eyes glared at Techno long enough to get the piglin hybrid to store his sword. Dream frowned but did the same to his axe. Niki huffed and then smiled. “Breakfast is ready.”

“What’s for breakfast?” asked Ranboo, visibly perking up.

“Pancakes!” Niki declared proudly. Dream’s mouth watered. He shook his head to regain his focus and realized that his mask was on the bedside table. He snatched it up and put it on. Peace snuffled and yawned, his white eyes blearily opening.

The tiny piglin let out a questioning snort. Techno snorted back, and Peace’s eyes fully opened. He hurried to scramble off the bed, and Dream grabbed him under his armpits and settled the child on his hip. Peace wrapped his arms around Dream, squeaking happily.

“To breakfast?” Niki suggested, even as brown eyes sparkled in Dream’s direction. The young woman appeared to want to coo. Dream straightened as best he could and nodded.

Niki near bounced out of the room. Ranboo gave Dream and Techno a quick glance before following her.

Dream started after the teen when a large hard hand landed on his shoulder.

“So the library after breakfast?” Techno asked. “Phil should be up to joining us. As you can see, his ideas aren’t half-bad.”

“I want to work alone for a while,” Dream said evasively. “I have some code to run that I need to fully concentrate on.”

“Bruh, don’t be like that,” Techno said with an exaggerated eye roll. “So we unlocked your tragic backstory. Doesn’t change the here and now. We still need to work out the whole undone omelet thing. And need synergy to get it done. Synergy doesn’t work with only one person. You know, since its *synergy*.”

“But it does work for two,” Dream pointed out. “You and Phil work together to figure out how to undo the Egg’s code your way, and I’ll work on it mine.”

“But if we work on it at the same time, it’ll go faster. Splitting up is a waste of resources.”

“You haven’t gotten full control of your Admin powers yet. Phil can help you with those while I do some more advanced study.”

“Dude. I just broke through your barrier blocks. Pretty sure that means I’m up somewhere near your level.”

“Phil helped,” Dream ground out. That was exactly the problem. No one should be able to break through his blocks (though he had used his weaker set—there was a reason he had let the enderman hybrid stay).

“Fine,” Techno growled, removing his hand. He then awkwardly patted Dream’s shoulder. “But we’re here for you and all that. Don’t try to do things alone, yada yada.”

“...was that your attempt at comfort?”

“Yeah. I know. It sucks. Chat is mocking me as we speak.”

“Please never do that again,” said Dream, queasiness swirling in his stomach. He pushed it down because he would not miss out on Niki’s cooking while he still could. He kept his hold on the tiny piglin who squeaked a “bye” to the larger piglin. Techno grunted a “no need” and followed them to Peace’s delight. Dream didn’t care.

Phil sat at the head of the kitchen table as they entered, and Dream debated heading back to his room.

“Good morning, mate,” Phil greeted eagerly. He grimaced. “We didn’t get to chat under the best circumstances yesterday, but I hope we can get along better from here on out. Niki and Techno told me about how you helped them out here, and I want you to know that whatever the me in this timeline thought, I’m more than happy to give you the benefit of the doubt.”

Dream nodded and sat Peace in a chair at the far end of the table and then sat in the chair beside it. Techno snorted and sat right beside Phil.

“So did you sleep well?” asked Phil as Niki handed out plates of pancakes with plenty of syrup on them. Dream shrugged as he ate through the enchantments in his mask. He should play nice, but...

He didn’t want to.

“What about you, Ranboo?” Phil asked. His grin took a mischievous bent. “You got to sleep in the safest part of the house.”

Ranboo semi-choked on the bite of pancakes he had been munching. Swallowing, he stared to the right of Phil. The enderman hybrid's cheeks grew rosy.

“I was supposed to be on guard duty, but I kinda fell asleep.”

“Guard duty? Seems a bit much for a room already barrier-blocked,” Phil said.

“We did break through the barrier though,” said Techno. “So it does make sense.”

“But I doubt the Egg could get through the barrier around the whole area without anyone noticing. Dream, mate. I think you are being over-paranoid.”

“People have gotten through my barrier blocks before,” Dream said harshly. He quickly finished the last of his pancakes. “And several people were hurt because of the action. I learn from my past mistakes.”

Phil frowned, but before he could continue, Dream grabbed Peace who had basically finished his meal and left the room. He headed down to the basement, focusing on the zeros and ones floating through his mind. They didn't have much time.

## Chapter End Notes

Ender Translation:

𐀀𐀁𐀂 𐀃𐀄𐀅 - You lied

𐀆𐀇𐀈 𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎𐀏 𐀐𐀑𐀒 𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗 𐀘𐀙? - Why didn't you tell me?

𐀚𐀛𐀜𐀝, 𐀞𐀟𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤 - Ender, come out





# Can't Make an Omelet without Breaking

## Chapter Summary

Distrust breeds distrust. At least the Egg is taken care of.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The zeros and ones glowing green flashed red, and Dream immediately burned the book he had been working on. Peace let out a surprised squeal, and Dream picked him up and quieted him.

“Is everyone all right?” asked Phil as he entered the library. Dream flipped his mask over his face and then stared at the man over his shoulder, angling Peace away from him.

“Everything’s fine,” Dream said. “Can I help you?”

“Got it backwards, mate. I came to see how I can help you. I may not be this server’s Admin, but I have plenty experience. I’ve probably been coding since before you were alive.”

Dream hummed noncommittally.

“What about Techno?”

“Tech’s learning in leaps and bounds. Makes me wonder what kinda terror he could have wrought if he had been born with those powers,” Phil replied, a dreamy look on his face. It faded into a wide grin. “Doomsday would have looked different, that’s for certain. I don’t think he would have been as...restrained with Admin powers as you are.”

“Techno fights fair,” Dream said flatly. “He wouldn’t have used them.”

“You sure, mate?” Phil said. “Because it wasn’t either of our ideas to attack early.”

Dream remained silent. After a moment, Dream hesitantly nodded. Better to go along with him.

“That’s true...”

“Techno’s very good, but against those numbers, he would have used every edge he could to win. Wither’s aren’t exactly fair.”

Nodding again, Dream bit back the fact that withers attack everyone, including those who summoned them. That was fair. But there was no point in arguing.

“So mate,” Phil said moving away from the shelf nearest the doorway towards Dream. “How do you plan to defeat the Egg?”

“With coding,” Dream answered vaguely, carefully watching Phil’s approach. He stood very still. “It used code first, and so using code against it is fair game.”

“Makes sense,” Phil said, stopping within a few blocks of Dream, between the younger Admin and the exit. All but trapping Dream in place. Phil frowned. “Sorry. Am I making you nervous?”

“We haven’t been on the best of terms.”

“Right,” Phil said, taking a step backwards. “Techno told me. Apparently this timeline’s version of me...jumped to some conclusions. Given what Techno said, I don’t think that version of me ever got to see Tommy’s true colors. Not to speak ill of the dead, but Tommy’s a f— brat. Did what he liked and then expected everyone else to get him out of the trouble he

made. Likely would have betrayed Techno all over again given the chance. But what the Egg did was...”

Phil winced. Dream stared.

“Yeah...that was definitely something I was glad I wasn't around to see. Maybe should have found a way around giving him to the Egg, but since apparently you didn't know, makes sense you used him as a bargaining chip. That the thing has Tubbo...probably the discs too. Tommy would have gone after them in a heartbeat. Gone with some 'extremely clever' plan that would have ended with everyone killed.”

Silently Dream watched as Phil shook himself as if to rid himself of the dark scenario.

“Look, what I'm saying is that I'm not the Phil you kicked out of here. I understand why you did what you did. And I would never do anything to the cute piglin in your arms. I remember when Techno was that age. He looked exactly like that.”

“Did you tell Techno that?” Dream asked. Phil shook his head.

“Pretty sure he doesn't remember it. Likely doesn't want me to talk about it either. But between you and me, he did all the things Niki says yours does. Still does the head bumping things from time to time. Did it to me the moment I was fully conscious.”

Phil's grin had returned. Soft and curled at the edges and filled with parental warmth. Dream marveled for a second before shaking his head.

“I have to go. It's his nap time,” Dream said. Peace squealed at the words, and Dream gave a soft grunt that silenced him. Phil whistled.

“Wish I had known that trick with Techno. How did you do that?” asked Phil.

Dream shrugged.

“Reminded him it was nap time or else.”

A throaty laugh bubbled up his throat.

“Yeah,” Phil huffed between laughs. “That wouldn’t have worked on Techno.”

Dream nodded and tilted his head. With a sudden movement, Dream took four quick steps and edged around Phil. Phil’s laughs startled to a stop, and Dream took the distraction to hurry out the door and down the hall. Phil sounded like he was calling Dream back, but Dream ignored him. Within minutes, Dream was back in his room with the newest barrier blocks on the other side of his door.

After settling Peace into bed, Dream fished a new notebook out of the server’s code. The numbers hissed and crackled harshly against his own green. He ignored them and instantly broke a single page into code. He trickled the green code into it and manipulated some of the white to shift into red. The green crackled into the red, and the red code vanished. The white code reappeared with jagged edges before falling into unusable numbers.

A cry of frustration boiled in Dream’s throat, and he threw the book against the farthest wall. A tiny sharp hand poked at the wrist that hadn’t thrown the book, and Dream moved his hand closer to the tiny one. A question squeak agitated and settled the heat in Dream’s chest. With a sigh, Dream flopped onto the bed. The tiny piglin wrapped himself tightly into Dream’s side. Dream’s arm cradled Peace close to his chest.

“I have to do it,” he confessed in a whisper. Peace’s tiny breaths huffed into the crook of Dream’s shoulder. “But I don’t want to.”

Peace snuggled further into Dream’s side. A cold hardness solidified in Dream’s chest. It didn’t matter. What mattered was keeping people...keeping Peace safe. Keeping Ender safe. And Niki. And Ranboo. And even Techno....

Couldn't he stay here? In this room? Or leave the server? Ranboo wouldn't go. And Ender— Niki could. He might even be able to convince her—

A slight snuffling sounded over his wavering heart. No. He looked down at the slumbering child using his ribcage as a pillow. He couldn't. This was his server. And he would have to take it back.

(He would have to hurt those he cared about again. ~~Would it be any different? Yes. Because he would never again rely on their *mercy*.~~)

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After dinner. One more meal, and then...then he would do what needs to be done.

~~(Why did he always have to be the bad guy?)~~

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Niki giggled at Peace held up his empty plate for the third time. More carrots (not golden this time) filled his plate with half a roasted chicken. The child eagerly dug in. Dream should hurry and finish the last of his own carrots and put an end to Peace's avid appetite before the child hurt himself. Savoring the carrot's earthy sweetness mixed with spikes of saltiness and something like pepper, Dream finished his last bite. He stealthily added several loaves of bread to his inventory next to the misshapen bunny he had found next to his door two days ago.

"Not the bones, Peace," he said softly. Peace's white eyes grew large and guilty, and the child put the chicken bones gently on the otherwise empty plate. "That's enough for today."

"He was really hungry today, wasn't he?" Niki said with a pleased grin. She rubbed the soft fur on Peace's head. "Trying to grow as big as Techno?"

A snort came from the older piglin at the table when Peace shook his head, stretched out his arms, and gave a squeaking snort. Ranboo gave his own half-stifled chuckle, earning a near

glare from Techno. Ranboo shrugged, and then Phil chuckled with little fear of the glare turning to him.

“Niki, would you take Peace to the library and read with him?” asked Dream as he patted the tiny piglin’s head. His fingers lingered, but he pulled them away. “And Ranboo, go with them. I want to show Phil and Techno something.”

“Sure. Not a problem,” Niki said, her grin widening. Her brown eyes flickered between the three men in hopeful expectation. She picked up Peace, who instantly latched on and bumped his head against hers. The hardness in Dream’s chest shook, but he ignored it. With another giggle, Niki bopped him back before picking up Blacklet and pressing him into Peace’s arms. “Come on, big guy. Let’s go on a reading adventure!”

“Reading adventure...?” Ranboo murmured. A narrow brown-eyed glare flashed towards the enderman hybrid, who awkwardly chuckled and cleared his throat as he stood. “A reading adventure it is.”

The enderman hybrid paused and stared at Dream.

“Ender wants to come with you,” Ranboo said almost blankly before blinking. “He’s really insisting.”

“{⌘△Λ⌘⌘⌘△Λ,” Dream hissed harshly. “△ω△↯σ⌘iΛσ⌘⌘⌘△Uσ.”

“Um...” Ranboo muttered. “He really doesn’t want you to be alone with Techno and Phil.”

“Dream’s our only way of defeating the undone omelet,” Techno huffed. “What exactly does he expect us to do?”

“Hurt him,” Ranboo answered firmly. He stared over Techno’s shoulder. “You did break into his room the other morning.”

“Exactly. And all I did was wake him up,” Techno defended.

“No—no, um, offense, Techno,” Ranboo stuttered as red and green eyes stared directly into narrow red. “But I don’t think you understand—Dream doesn’t trust you. So neither does Ender.”

“And you?” asked Phil. “Do you trust us, Ranboo?”

The enderman hybrid froze. The red and green eyes flashed, and then green and red eyes glared. A mouth full of sharp teeth unhinged and let out a half-note of a screech before snapping shut. Eyes closed and reopened into tired red and green.

“I pick people not sides,” Ranboo softly whispered, a layer of hissing underlying his words. “And you’re making Ender mad and Dream upset. I—I just want us to get along. Hasn’t the Egg taken enough?”

“It’s okay, Ranboo,” Dream said with an underlying hiss of his own. “{⌘△人⌘⌘△人. You’re upsetting Ranboo.” Ranboo started to close his eyes, but Dream placed a hand on the enderman hybrid’s shoulder and forced him to look at Dream. The teen flinched (oh, he still had on the mask), and Dream bent forward to knock his mask-covered forehead into Ranboo’s. “Don’t. Don’t let him take over. He’s throwing a tantrum. I’ll be fine.”

“You promise?” Ranboo softly asked, pushing his head against Dream’s. Dream’s back itched at the intent eyes watching the scene, but it didn’t matter. It was too late. His supposed attachment to these fools was obvious (no, he was the fool—~~soon enough they wouldn’t even pretend to care~~).

“I’ll be fine,” he repeated, pulling back to gently bump his head against Ranboo’s. He then carefully pushed the boy towards Niki and Peace. The former was smiling widely in a way that made Dream shift uncomfortably. “Enjoy your reading adventure.”

“Right...” Ranboo muttered. He gave Dream a quick red and green glance. “Teach me to use boats to fly later?”

Dream paused. Red and green eyes glittered with mischief and worry. With an annoyed grunt, Dream nodded. Peace copied Dream’s grunt. Techno burst out laughing, making Peace repeat the grunt again. Dream ignored Techno and grunted something else. He then flicked Peace’s forehead, and the tiny piglin huffed in a way that indicated he had been spending entirely too much time with the still laughing piglin hybrid. (~~Soon they could spend all the time they wanted together.~~)

“Did—did you teach your child a Piglin swear word?” Niki said with barely hidden giggles. Dream turned away from her and did not answer. He was not answering that.

“Pst, Peace. Say that again,” Ranboo almost whispered. Niki knocked the back of the teen’s shoulder.

“Ow. It was for research.”

“We’re leaving now,” Niki said. Amusement colored her words. Dream kept his eyes on Phil and the recovering Techno. “And whatever your Papa said, don’t repeat it again. Okay?”

Peace gave a small squeaking snort as an affirmative, and Niki’s giggles finally escaped her. She scolded and threatened Ranboo as she led them towards the library. Dream watched and listened until he heard the library door open and shut.

“So what was so important that you had to send Ranboo and Niki away?” Phil asked. “Did you find a way to defeat the Egg?”

Dream nodded. Instantly he had the other two’s attention. He walked past the two to the entrance to the house (careful not to fully expose his back to either). Half-turning to check that the two were following him, he walked out the door and stood a dozen blocks away from the house. Techno walked out first, followed by Phil. Dream mentally estimated they were a five blocks away from each other. He threw the potions in his hand directly at Techno.



“What—?” Techno spluttered before falling into a heap onto the grass. Hopefully it was soft enough to keep the piglin hybrid from breaking anything.

“Techno,” Phil cried in almost convincingly. The man hurried to the fallen warrior, but Dream was faster and got between them. Nightmare gleamed ominously in Dream’s hand, pointing straight to Phil’s throat. “What did you do to him?!”

“You know what I did to him,” Dream said, standing firm in front of the heaving piglin hybrid. “I’m not letting you touch him.”

“Why would I know that?!” Phil growled. “If you cause him irrevocable harm like you did Tommy—”

“Stop,” Dream cut the man off, tired of the charade. “I won’t let you take him.”

“Take him? Take him where exactly?” Phil accused. “Outside to the Egg?”

Dream didn’t dignify that with a response. The man, or rather his body, tensed and then loosened into a too-relaxed stance. Then a chuckle racked the man’s frame, starting low and then reaching a higher and higher pitch until the chuckle had fully morphed into a cackle. A red glow backlighting blue eyes as they fell on Dream.

“So you knew,” the grinning man said, each word holding a different creak. “You knew all along.”

“I suspected,” Dream whispered, even as his once-rival struggled to rise up behind him. “After all, code like the Egg’s, like yours, does not just disappear. But our conversation the other day confirmed it.”

“And yet you didn’t say anything until now.” The grin tightened and widened unnaturally. “Now that I’ve seen and catalogued your every weakness. What are you going to do?”

“Kill you,” Dream said, only slightly above a whisper. He could feel Techno’s increased efforts to stand.

“Oh? And gain the hatred of the man behind you?”

Dream didn’t answer. He had been hated before, and the piglin hybrid’s hatred would not be any different. Maybe Techno would find a way to use his increased control of code to lock Dream away somehow. Not that he would be sticking around to find out. But he couldn’t... why was he doing this? Why didn’t he ever learn?

But he couldn’t—He couldn’t just—

“You fool,” the thing wearing Phil’s face grinned. A sword struck at Dream’s mask. Dream stepped and bent back to avoid the strike. He then snapped back upright and swung Nightmare at the once-Avian. The blade struck and dug into the man’s chest. Red eyes widened, and blood dribbled out the once-grinning lips.

Yanking the axe out of flesh, Dream prepared for a returning blow, but the man wobbled and fell forward. Dream stumbled back, but the man’s form slumped onto him. He froze under the bloody, ripped weight.

“...thank you,” whispered the barely breathing corpse. “...take care of...”

A huff of breath attempted a final word, but it didn’t have the force to finish. And then no breath blew into Dream’s ear. The slumped body pushed harder down on Dream, and Dream gave a panicked step backwards. What had been Phil flopped onto the ground.

A loud squealing screech broke the momentary silence, and Dream flinched. He spun around and raised Nightmare, readying again for a hard, attacking blow. But the piglin hybrid

dragged himself slowly and painfully towards Dream, squeals and snorts directed at the body behind him. The large man's movements jerked and trembled with wasted energy, and yet Techno kept pulling his bloody body forward.

Nightmare fell from loose fingers.

Techno passed Dream as if he wasn't there.

Phil's body bled its remnants onto the grass.

Sharp-fingered hands dug into the green jacket, and the squealing snorts became a howl.

Dream couldn't watch. But he couldn't move.

The howl settled, and the sobs began. Indecipherable words spluttered behind Dream, but he didn't turn. He didn't try to make them out. They were not for him.

The trail of blood staining the grass blocks compelled Dream to turn. To look on the broken bodies. The puddle of blood still grew and spread along the green grass.

Yanking a last weakness potion out of his inventory, Dream threw it on the senseless piglin hybrid. Techno slumped fully forward, fully on Phil. Dream clenched his empty fists, and then another potion appeared in his hand. The healing splattered on the two, but only one breathed easier.

Fingers slipped into code, a command ran, and the larger body disappeared. Dream did not have a lot of time. He walked over to what remained of Phil and bent down. A blink, and the corrupted code dashed through his vision. As he expected, it was trying to sink into the blacks beneath, but the difference between living code and inanimate had slowed it down. And Techno was immune (and if he wasn't, it wouldn't matter later.)

He pressed a full hand against the code and carefully inserted the proto-code he and—

The antivirus instantly attacked the code. The corruption fought back, but the small code slipped through the corruption's defenses. And soon nothing was left of corrupted code. The body of the Avian lay played at Dream's feet, but it too soon disappeared.

"What happened?"

Dream looked over his shoulder at a breathless Niki.

"Phil had been infected."

"But I thought—" she started, before cutting herself off. "He attacked Techno?"

"The Egg modified its code to imitate Phil's personal code almost perfectly," Dream explained almost tonelessly. "The Egg has been in control since he woke up."

"So what he said about the other timeline?"

Dream shook his head but then stopped. He let his mask look away from her.

"All true," he said softly. Didn't matter. What they thought they did or didn't know didn't matter. "It used the information it had to try to convince me Phil was..." His voice suddenly stopped. He tried to push through, to continue to explain. But no sound passed between his lips.

Why was he doing this? Why was he standing here, explaining? They wouldn't believe him (~~no one ever did~~). He had better things to be doing. He turned away from Niki and headed towards the barrier.

“Dream, wait. Why is Techno unconscious? Where’s Phil?” Niki asked, hurrying along behind him. “Dream, stop. Please. What happened?!”

Dream ignored her and kept walking. He didn’t run. He didn’t want to exhaust himself before doing what needed to be done. Now. Before the Egg recovered.

“Where are you going? Whatever happened, we’ll...we’ll figure it out. Don’t...don’t do anything rash.”

Dream snorted. Nothing rash. Like letting them come in here. Like dealing for their safety. Like pretending to care for them (until it wasn’t pretend). He had done plenty of rash things. What he was doing was well-thought out in comparison. The only currently unknown variable was the woman following behind him.

He stopped, and Niki nearly smacked into him. She managed to halt herself half a block from his back. His mask faced her. She stared at it with determination and uncertainty.

“Ranboo’s in a bit of a panic, so I don’t want to leave him alone with Peace for long. I mean Ender could probably step in if he’s too overwhelmed, but I have a feeling he’d march right out here to check on you instead. So let’s hurry back,” she said, stretching out a hand slowly to grab his. “We’ll—we’ll figure this out. Whatever happened, we’ll figure it out.”

“...sorry,” squeezed up his throat. Niki opened her mouth again, but a purplish potion splashed across her face. The surprise rippled cartoonishly slowly across her face, and Dream dashed towards the barrier. He heard slow, plodding thumps behind him, but they fell further and further behind. Reaching the barrier, he broke three of the blocks and stepped through. Instantly, he replaced them. A heaving Niki ran in slow motion on the other side of the barrier.

Putting a hand on the barrier, Dream did an imitation of a wave, the best he could give her. Activating the if-function protocol on the barrier, he moved away from it and to the remnants of the snow wall. The vines stayed limp on the other side as he bent down and reached for one. The red code crackled at his fingers, but he grabbed it and ran the zeros and ones he had used on Phil moments ago.

The code closest his fingers sparked from red to green. The newly green code sliced into the red and changed more of the red to green. The whole vine quickly shifted from red to green. Whispers of green code floated upwards near his ears, and he nodded as a set of numbers became clear. Leaving this piece of green code to grow, he ran the growingly familiar command and disappeared.

He reappeared next to a twenty foot oval mass of crackling red that could be called an egg in the way one might call a fox a dog. Nothing about it felt anything but wrong. The red code immediately smashed against his. New whispers, or perhaps old, prodded at him. Hissed promises and threats. He muted them like he had Techno weeks ago and splayed both hands on the side of the red, angry mass.

His hands sunk into the red. The red circled his wrists and tried to claim his hands. Green oozed into the red wheedling into Dream's code. Soon the area around his hands glowed green and spread like a glowing puddle around and into the Egg's red code.

A snap crackled, and the whispers returned. They reminded him how he was here. Where he had been before. Where he would be again without the Egg's threat. How it could stop *them*. How *they* were under its control. How *they* could be under Dream's.

The green faltered as a vision of Sapnap and George grin and run towards him. Tubbo shows off his bees and asks for tips growing better flowers. Bad throws an arm around Dream and calls him a muffin. Tommy curses him out and then demands Dream goes mining with him. Others wave and invite him to check out their houses or some other cool thing they found. Not a one treats him with suspicion or envy.

Dream grit his teeth. That was gone. The Egg couldn't bring it back, no matter what it promised. Even mostly brainwashed they wouldn't—he wasn't—That Dream was gone. Those people were gone. (That fantasy was no longer worth trying for.)

The vision stuttered and shifted. Niki stands in front of him with a plate of cookies. Ranboo shoves himself next to her and tries to steal one of the freshly baked treats, but Niki moves the plate away from him. She scolds him, and Ender hisses trying to reach around her.

The plate is taken from Niki's hands and hidden in an inventory. Techno looks rather smug as he bites into the one cookie left in his hand. A squeak sounds and pulls at Techno's red cape.

With an amused huff, Techno bends down and lets another cookie appear in his hand. Tiny hoof-like hand grabs it and stuffs it into a small mouth. Large pink eyes look up at Dream, and the slobbered cookie pops out of the growing smile. The cookie is then offered in Dream's direction.

Niki stops yelling at an indifferent Techno to look at Peace and smile widely at the scene. Techno makes a snarky comment that earns him a slap on the arm from Niki. Ranboo offers to take the cookie if Dream doesn't want it. Peace squeals in indignation and pushes the cookie further in Dream's direction. They all look at him to see what he would do.

Dream reached for the cookie. His fingers nearly closed around it when shadowed crimson eyes caught his own. Shadowed crimson instead of bright blood. Eyes that looked at him in amusement instead of hatred (~~like they should~~). False. This was false. And he would know. He would always know.

The green code blaze bright enough to blind. Bright enough to burn away the scene, the illusion before him. Green arced from Dream and broke through red. The red recoiled back, but the green shot out and pursued. For an instant, Dream was green zapping through the red and across the entire server. Dividing red code from black, white, tan, yellow, grass green, diamond blue, stone grey, totem brown—He saw every inch of his server where the red had wiggled and torn into. And then it was gone. The last red numbers splintered and reformed to what they should have been.

Groans echoed in a variation of notes around Dream. The green code slipped out from his hands fully. Dream's knees buckled, and his face crashed into his mask as it smacked the floor.

"Dream?" said a voice entirely too close to him. He had to move. He had to go. Arms turned him face up, or so he assumed as the world spun. "Dream! Are you okay?"

"Wha-what happened?" came another familiar voice. Shuffles came closer. "Bad? Is that—  
Dream? Is he okay?"

A sobbing cry split the awaiting air, and hands tightened around Dream.

“Tommy! Tommy! Please! Toms! Wake up!” The voice (Tubbo’s—it had to be) shook. “Someone, help him. He’s not—he’s not moving.”

Steps hurried over to the sound, and Dream’s sight blurred the movement into view. Ponk hunched over something past Bad’s black and white hoodie. Everything had stilled around Ponk as the doctor moved furiously. And then Ponk himself stilled. Dream could almost make out the shake of his head. A heartbroken sob followed the miniscule motion.

“...what happened?” Antfrost repeated in hollow tones.

“I think...I think Dream got rid of the Egg down to its code,” Bad said. “And Tommy...he was the Egg’s vessel. I don’t think—there wasn’t enough of Tommy left.”

Ponk had moved, and now the gaping body of Tommy was in full view. As was Tubbo. His whole body crumpled and shaking in anguish. (That’s two for two today.)

Dream’s hand finally responded to his brain’s commands, and he lifted it and prepped the oh-so common command. He paused as his fingers traced the reflexive coordinates. No. Not there. He added the necessary flourishes to make them opposite and ran them. Bad gasped and fingers dug into his torso, but they were gone.

He lay in a desert and stared at the unforgiving sun in the sky. The server code sang beneath him. Expressing its pleasure to the Admin as only it could. It shouldn’t be wasting its energy.

The heat burned at his exposed skin and drew the moisture out of his heavily clothed body. But he didn’t move. He embraced the misery it brought. The sun dipped in the horizon, and he mustered the little remaining energy he had to stand. Slowly he analyzed his surroundings in the dying sun. His feet headed towards the rising moon.

He would begin working to leave in the morning. He would. But he wanted one more night on the server. One more night on his freed land. And then he would leave. He would.



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The ravine he'd found went deep into the earth. Several lava streams and waterfalls littered the caves the ravine lead into. He dug further into the cave walls, making a few newer more structured caverns that resembled rooms. Various piles of copper, gold, and iron ore lay in chests made from wood he had climbed the ravine to scavenge.

He should use the myriad of cobblestone to make a furnace and smelt the iron. Make a bucket. Make a Nether portal. Get the needed materials. Go the End. Leave. Dream walked over to a chest further from the rest. Undoing the intricate tripwire, he lifted the lid and took a loaf of bread out. He held it and then put it back before the code holding its freshness in place broke. He made sure the tripwire was back in place and then pulled out a loaf from his inventory instead. The dirt taste defiled his tongue, but he used the increased energy to grab a pickaxe and head down to the newest cavern he had been shaping.

His foot hit air and sent him tumbling down his stone-mined steps. His back flared with pain as it hit the bottom, and Dream nearly groaned. Instead he stood and prepared his pickaxe. The pickaxe flew from his hand. Dream stared at the pickaxe. The torchlight only shone on and shadowed the pickaxe. Slowly Dream reached for it. The pickaxe spun away from him.

Narrowing his eyes behind his mask, Dream closed his eyes and opened them. Zeros and ones ran across the cavern floor and in the torch and through its light. The pickaxe lay in a bundle of code in the corner. But a swirl of broken ones and zeros hovered over it. They held no true shape and barely stayed together.

"...hello?" Dream croaked. He cleared his throat and winced at the weak sound. The loose code glitched to a stop at his word before spinning faster and heading towards Dream. Dream stayed still as the jagged code rammed against his, but the most it could do was tug and tear at his code's loosest pieces. Meaning Dream's cloak faintly moved. The swirling code slowed and sagged as if exhausted and started to trail away. "...wait."

The broken code skittered and stopped, somehow conveying surprise. Dream reached out and gently nudged a floating number one. The one didn't cut into his own code despite the jagged edges, but Dream could sense that it was going to crack under the gentle nudge and instantly used his own code to strengthen it. The one glowed and smoothed itself out. It skittered over to a zero and linked with it. The two numbers soon spun together in the otherwise loose code.

Quickly pushing the code for his mask aside, he peered more carefully at the skittering, scattered code. As carefully as he could, he started running his hands and code over the brittle numbers. The zeros and ones soon hurried over to his hands to gain the strength to form a shape, form a solid concept. Or at least semi solid.

Dream's vision began to blur, and his hands quivered. A number snapped in his hold, and he focused long enough to put it back together. After that, the code skittered away from him again. Dream heaved as the world solidified into a cavern, a pickaxe, and a torch. He swayed and fell onto his butt. His head bumped against a wall, but no pain registered beyond the burning in his own lungs. Too much. He had used too much.

Something almost solid settled into his side and poked his ribs. Dream grimaced but did not turn to look at the empty air. He had not fixed the code fully. Whatever the code was. Or was it whoever? (Could it be?) No. It didn't matter. Something (it might be someone but he didn't dare—) was broken on his server. And he would fix it. He was the server's Admin, and the most he could do was make sure it had healed to the best of his ability before he left.

He would do that. He would fix this utter mess of code, and then he would leave. He would. (There was nothing worth waiting for.)

His eyes closed, exhaustion pulling the lids down over unfocused eyes. A weightless force pushed against Dream's side, and Dream mumbled.

"...later...can't..."

The semi-solid force stopped pushing and quivered faintly. It then seemed to press into Dream's side and curl against him like—Dream cut off the thought even as his mind drifted into unconsciousness.

In his dreams, he held a tiny shuffling piglin close.

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“Calm down,” Dream hissed as the code pinched his fingers. The code vibrated and almost managed to growl. Dream’s lips twitched downwards. He blinked and the code came into view. Several sessions had the code in a somewhat humanoid shape that only manifested as a blur in normal view. He reached over to the code and began sliding his own over the more cracked numbers. His fingers slipped, and he fell through the code onto the stone below. Another blink reset his view back to basic.

Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to sit back up. His head spun. He reached for the bread in his inventory, but there was nothing there. No food left. How long had he been down in this half-finished cavern?

The blur jammed itself into his shoulder. Dream scowled.

“Give me a minute,” he snapped. The air itself weighed heavy around him. “I...I’m low on stamina.”

The blur back off and then floated(?) up the mined stairs. Dream bit down on his teeth harder and wobbled onto his feet. Slowly he followed the blur up the mined stairs. His personal cavern looked somewhat unfamiliar as he entered it. (Had he been down there so long?)

The blur hovered over the only booby trapped chest in the room. Dream stared at the blur unimpressed and headed to the other chests nearby. Irritation burned through him as he realized that they all held ore or blocks. Not a single one held any food. He would have to go out of the ravine.

The room blurred entirely, and Dream shook his head. He would need to hurry.

He started to head towards his well-hidden door when the blur itself blocked his way. The scowl returned to Dream’s face, and he quickly slid his mask into place.

“If you want me to continue fixing you, I have to get food. I need...stamina to keep using my powers,” Dream explained, ignoring the yawn that cut through the center of his words. The

blur did the almost growl again and tried to push him towards the trapped chest. Dream pushed through the semi-solid code instead. “That is off limits. I’ll find food on the surface.”

The blur pulled at his cloak, but he ignored it and went out the door. He started to scale up the sides of the ravine. Dizziness overwhelmed him, and he lost his footing. He nearly tilted off the wall and back to bottom of the ravine. Something semi-solid steadied him. It tugged Dream towards the safest way back down. Dream kept scaling upwards.

A few more near misses, and Dream heaved himself up and onto the side of the ravine. Splayed on the dirt, he smirked through his mask at the blur.

“Told you I could make it.”

The blur buzzed, a soft whisper of an annoying sound. It then pinched Dream’s arm.

“Ow. Is that the worst you can do?” Dream grouched as he pulled himself up. The buzz returned, and for a moment Dream could swear he heard hissed words. No, the hissing was coming from elsewhere—Dream scrambled and ran as a familiar green figure crawled in his direction. He pulled out a stone axe he had hurriedly made after realizing he had left Nightmare (dropped it and left like—) and readied to defend himself from the creeper even as his heart beat heavy and fast against his chest.

The creeper flashed, and Dream backed up in time to miss most of the explosion. The hissing was gone, and he could breathe again. The blur shoved him hard enough to have him stumble into the ground. Dream grunted a near growl before noting the sun filtering through the nearby trees. Hadn’t it been night a minute ago?

Shrugging, he headed to where he knew there were berry bushes. With practice and skill, he liberated the berries from their bushes and filled his mouth with them. He could feel his energy returning and hurried to gather more. He found a few cows and pigs milling about and ran not-Nightmare through them. After gathering enough food for a few weeks, he climbed a nearby tree and jumped from branch to branch back to the ravine. He fell a couple of times, but he quickly scrambled back up the branches. The blur tried to keep up with him, but for all its semi-solid state, it was slow.



# Patience can be Rewarded

## Chapter Summary

Dream works at fixing the code and gets an unexpected visitor. And then he runs.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The numbers of the code no longer had jagged edges, and it appeared to be healing itself. The blur had gained a ghostly glow. It also had taken to snatching Dream's food and eating it itself. Dream grumbled but didn't stop the code. It needed the energy to properly heal.

With a silent huff, Dream wove through the passages into his caverns and up toward the ravine wall. The code floated behind him, gluing itself to his side as it had done since it first appeared. Dream scrambled up the side of the ravine while the code hovered behind him. It didn't shove him at all this time, and he made it to the top without stumbling. He took out his newest iron axe and began picking berry bushes.

The code floated over a berry bush near the one Dream was working on and pinched at it. Or tried to. In a brief blink, Dream saw that the code still flowed around the objects code instead of interacting with it. The code began to mangle itself as it pounded itself against the bush. Munching on some berries, Dream moved over to the code and its bush. His hand closed over the furthest stretches of code and ran his own code around and through a few of the faintly yellow zeros and ones.

Smoothing out some of the jutting edges the code had made of itself, Dream guided the numbers into something that resembled the shape of a hand. Then he put the badly formed hand on the small, delicate code of the berries' stems. Several berries fell to the ground.

Brightening from a faint, cloudy yellow to a more soft dusty shade, the code briefly twirled. It then sped around from bush to bush separating their berries from them. Dream blinked, and the white, cloudy glow flew over to another bush. The faint outline of a hand pushed itself into the bush, and then the bush's berries spilled onto the grass below. Dream felt his lips push slightly up, and he hurried behind scooping up berries and storing them in his inventory. Soon no berries remained.

The white glow moved towards a tree and knocked against it. The tree shook, but the wood did not crack under the assault. The code tried again. The tree shook again. The process repeated various times until the white glow began slowly dimming.

Another bunch of berries went into Dream's mouth, and he blinked the full code back into view. The faint hand shape had come undone, and Dream inserted himself between the tree and the code to fix it. The code instantly stopped, waiting for Dream's next move. Dream took the dusty yellow numbers and carefully remolded the hand. The hand moved around Dream to slam into bark-lined code.

Dream grabbed the newly formed hand and held it in place.

"...it needs to settle," Dream said quietly. The code got more agitated if he spoke firmly or too loudly. Though it stiffened if he whispered and became unresponsive for hours. "Your code is remembering how to interact with the world, and that was a good start. But if you push too hard, then it'll forget again. Pushing is not bad, but not all at once."

The code buzzed and yanked the hand out of Dream's grip (progress!). It didn't move back to the tree. Dream held out half the berries. The code snatched them and integrated their code into its own. Dream could almost make out the specific zeros and ones for stamina multiplying.

Closing his eyes, he listened to the sound that could almost have been a mouth munching squishy berries. Maybe. Soon. And then he would leave. Once the code was fixed as best as possible, he had nothing to keep him here. (Nothing worth waiting for.) He would not make the mistake of staying on this server. Not again.

A sharp pain pressed into his chest, and Dream stumbled backwards. The sun had started setting. Hadn't it been high in the sky a moment ago? The code yanked at Dream's cloak, pulling Dream. Dream allowed the code to pull him back to the ravine. Strangely, it didn't push him into the ravine so much as let go and buzz loudly before descending down a block or so.

Taking the hewn path down (anything else would end with a loud, angry buzz in his ear), Dream descended. He realized a little late that he hadn't found any cows or pigs, and so he would need to return to the surface again tomorrow. The code would fight him every step if he tried to go back up now. It had the last time this happened. (Why was he fixing it again?)

The code went from hovering behind him to hurrying in front of him when they had headed far enough into the cavern that there was little chance of Dream trying to climb back up the ravine. Dream briefly considered making a run back towards the top. The code was anything but fast. It was persistent though. It would catch up eventually and annoy Dream into going back into the ravine. And dealing with it and the mobs would require too much energy to deal with right now.

A spicy, sweet scent hit Dream's nose, and the earlier axe fell back into his hand. The delicious whiffs grew stronger as Dream moved closer to the main cavern, the one where he had stored his furnace and crafting table. The code dashed back from that cavern and pulled his cloak back towards the entrance of the ravine.

Dream ignored it and continued forward. He quieted his steps and slunk towards the shadows in between the torchlights.

"I know you're out there, Dream," called a familiar voice. "I know what you sneaking around sounds like."

Dream straightened, and his lungs squished together. He hadn't expected... Why was Bad here?

"You coming in or not, you muffin," Bad called, and Dream peeked into the entrance of the decently-sized cavern. Bad looked over his shoulder where he stood in front of the furnace. "There you are. I was beginning to think that I was going to have to hunt you down like old times. Glad to see that's not the case. Especially after how long it's already take for me to track you down even with the compass and you basically standing still."

Dream stared at the tall demon. Bad shifted slightly under Dream's mask's stare, but he waited patiently. Bad had always been the most patient of them. The most willing to hear others out. Likely why the Egg had so quickly taken control of him. Dream slowly stepped



into the cavern, earning a wide smile that he'd long lost hope of seeing. A long forgotten warmth filled his core and swelled out his eyes.

"Guess what?!" Bad said cheerily. (A cheer filled with something that the Egg had taken away.) He pulled out a bowl. "I made beetroot soup! Found a village a few thousand blocks from here that gladly let me have some beetroots. And I made some cooked rabbit to go with it! It's been a while, but that's still your favorite meat dish, right?"

The warmth spilled down his cheeks, and he nearly pushed aside his mask to wipe at it. But he stood still instead, suddenly too full to move.

"Oh. I guess tastes change," Bad said, his long tail flicking behind him. The smile grew rigid. "Do you...maybe...not like meat at all any more? Because if you don't, that's fine. I'll store some for later. Eat it for breakfast. Rabbit with eggs can be a pretty good breakfast. I can even take it to go if you want. Just...I wanted to see you were doing okay. Especially after... after the whole—"

Bad's semi-ramblings broke off, and his expressive white (white!) eyes shifted downwards.

"I should get to telling you the whole reason I came here," Bad spoke softer, his smile shrinking and disappearing. (No, don't stop.) His body twisted slightly, and his tail twitched. "I—I wanted to apologize. For the whole Egg fiasco. I should have..." The glowing white eyes grew wet around the edges. A clawed hand reached up to wipe at them. "Sorry. I told myself I wouldn't—" He took a deep breath and continued. His white, clear eyes focused solely on Dream. "Dream, no amount of apologies can make up for what I did. What I let happen. You're this server's Admin and my friend. As soon as the Egg appeared, I should have informed you immediately. I should have run and gotten you to take care of it. It doesn't matter what else you were doing at the time or how strange you were acting. I should have told you, as a once-Admin, *as your friend*, that the Egg, a virus, had gotten on your server. I'm so so sorry. And I understand if you...if you want me to leave your server."

The tall demon kept his gaze on Dream even as his body twitched again. Dream blinked and narrowed his eyes. The black and white-lined code swirled in front of the furnace's glowing ember ones. The zeros and ones remained clear and without shadow. Dream's eyes closed and then open wide. Bad still stood there occasionally twitching. He was real. He had come. He had—why?

“...it is my job to find and protect the server from viruses,” Dream whispered. The glowing blur shook at the tone, but they weren’t directed at it. The softest, smallest smile curved on the glowing line of Bad’s mouth.

“Oh, Dream. Always incredibly hard on yourself,” Bad said with a shake of his head. “There was a lot going on. I’m not surprised you missed the Egg’s appearance. +As your friend I should have helped you out and report things like the Egg to you to take care of.”

The warmth grew cold, and Dream shook. Bad didn’t know.

“I knew about the Egg,” Dream said as firmly as the quavers in his voice allowed him. “I let it take the server.”

“You knew about it once it had taken a good portion of the server,” Bad defended. Smoke pattered out of the furnace, and Bad yelped and pulled out the cooked rabbit from the graying smoke. He put them on the table that hadn’t been there before. “Phew. I thought they had burned. I mean, they would have still been edible, but they would have tasted like coal.”

“I made a deal with the Egg,” Dream said louder. “I was going to leave it alone as long as it left me alone.”

“But you didn’t,” Bad said as he placed the beetroot soup onto the table next to the cooked rabbit. “You took in Techno and Phil and their group.”

“At the cost of Tommy,” Dream said, volume rising. The code hissed beside him. “I gave him to the Egg. I let the Egg—” Nausea overcame him, and his hand flew to his mask-covered mouth.

“And I brokered that deal,” Bad said softly, his hands and attention seemingly on the wooden bowl holding the spicy-sweet soup. “I came to you, remember? I tried to sway you towards the Egg like I did everyone I came into contact with. I gave it all the info I could to—to help it corrupt you. I...I told it secrets that you had trusted me with...And when you offered

Tommy, I took the chance with glee. I got excited when it...it ripped its way into Tommy's code. I...I...I wanted you to see what the Egg could do. I wanted you to let it corrupt you like \_\_\_\_"

The bowl in Bad's hands broke, shattering his words and spilling the soup it held onto the table and ground. Bad gave another yelp before giving a wordless cry in frustration and smashing the remaining bowl pieces against the nearest wall. Dream stepped back as the demon sliced at every bowl piece with his claws and pounded on the wall. Bad's full monstrous height bared down on the fragments of wood.

The code buzzed and yanked at Dream's arm and in a new display of force dragged Dream back three steps. Bad's pounding had stopped. Splinters of wood scattered around Bad's small feet. The demon slumped and folded into himself. Another hard yank from the code pulled Dream further away from the huddled demon. Dream tore himself away from the code's piercing grip and stumbled towards Bad. Towards his hunter. (~~Towards his friend.~~)

Falling to his knees, Dream imitated a movement he had seen Sapnap use the only other time Dream had seen the kind-hearted demon lose his temper. He placed a hand on Bad's skinny knee and patted it. Pushing aside his hesitation, Dream pressed his side into Bad's much longer one. Bad's tail looped around Dream's waist like a third arm even as the demon's true ones tightened around Bad's lanky torso.

"...the Egg. It was the one affecting you," Dream said. Bad would never have acted that way otherwise. (Not like Dream.)

"Oh, Dream," Bad spoke with a soft keen Dream hadn't hear in so long. "The Egg doesn't—didn't work like that. It controlled people one of two ways. It completely took over their—" Bad took a ragged breath that smoothed into a whisper of a whimper. His eyes closed, and he continued, "Their—their personal code. Like—like Tommy...Or it offered you your heart's desire and you agreed to let it infect you. I *let* the Egg use me."

"Why?" Dream asked, not moving away from the demon's odd cooling warmth.

"Because it promised to make me happy," Bad answered. "It made me feel special. It made me feel like...like it had chosen me out of everyone to be its guardian. To be its ambassador to the server. To not be just someone who stayed out of fights, but the one to show everyone

how great the Egg was and make the fights stop all together. Unify them under the Egg. As if there was no problem with that. As if trying to bring the whole server under the Egg's control wasn't stealing was your server out from under you. As if I didn't know what a server means to its Admin."

"...didn't matter," Dream said, his voice soft again.

"Of course it mattered! This is *your* server, and I was helping some unknown entity tear it away from you!"

"You would have shown it to me if I had been nearby," Dream admitted. "I wouldn't have recognized exactly what it was, too busy thinking about how I was going to...to save the server from the people on it. How I was going to force people to get along—"

"Stop right there," Bad snapped. Dream flinched and tried to move away, but Bad's tail held him in place. "You are my friend, and after you ran off, I didn't even try to find you. Even when I saw how everyone fighting was affecting you. As if I didn't know how much you wanted this server to be a safe place, to be the family you never had. I didn't check on you, remind you that you weren't alone. Not even when I found a strange whispering Egg or when you never came back. I let you run off because Sapnap said—"

Bad's mouth snapped closed, but Dream could imagine what would have spilled out if the demon had continued. Sapnap had made his feelings clear across timelines. An arm settled across Dream's shoulders. Dream tensed, but a long forgotten weight settled on Dream's head. (When was the last time Bad had done this?)

"We messed up," Bad said, the words vibrating through Dream's skull pleasantly. "But only one of us should have known better. You? Running off on your own? If that wasn't a cry for help, then I don't know what was."

"You don't—" Dream started and stopped. He breathed and leaned slightly deeper into Bad's side. Then he pulled away as much as he could in the demon's grip, Bad's arm and tail still holding him in place. Bad's head slipped off his (and the arm and tail would let go soon enough). "The Egg and I had a deal long before you showed up at my base."

“How? Did you let onto the server?” Bad said on the cusp of a gasp. The arm around Dream loosened, and Dream should wiggle away. Should escape the grip of his fri—hunter.

“It had Karl,” Dream said, the words slow and heavy. The others—people knew. So should Bad. “It brought me back in time.”

“It did?” Bad said, surprise and wonder in the word. His face had turned its full attention on Dream, and the Admin saw as disgust flickered over Bad’s face. Dream waited for the arm and tail to fully move.

The arm regained its grip on Dream’s shoulders.

“Of course it did. That’s why it was always keeping Karl close or on missions. It wanted to control Karl’s time traveling. Given the little I remember and know about its conversations with Karl, time travel didn’t work the way the Egg wanted it to. But why would the Egg bring the one person that it knows could destroy it to a time where it had just entered the server and was at its weakest?”

“...Techno,” Dream whispered, the name wrung from his soul. Keep going. Don’t—don’t think about them. “...the Egg was weakened by—by him and...The Egg offered me a deal.”

“A deal?” Bad said, his dark forehead creasing with white lines. “I mean, I understand. It—It’s really compelling.” The demon bit his lip and then took a deep breath. “But you’ve always been stubborn and ridiculously responsible. What could it had offered you that let you give it free reign over the server? You’ve always been so careful with this server from the beginning. Making sure no one could go to the End and mess with the server’s core. Stopping people from wrecking the server, at least until that whole thing with Wilbur and L’Manberg. And after that—”

White, glowing eyes went from thoughtfully narrow to shocked wide.

“That’s it. That’s when the Egg brought you back from whatever future the server used to have and into this one. That’s why you ran and told Sap—” Again Bad’s words got cut off as

the demon snapped his mouth closed. The glowing eyes dulled. “Oh,” came out the shaky understanding. “You—you meant it.”

A twitch of a flinch flashed through Dream, and he looked away from Bad.

“Oh, Dream,” Bad whispered. His side pulled away from Dream’s, and the arm left Dream’s shoulder. Of course that would be the final straw for Bad. Of course words spoken in spite and grief would come back to haunt Dream (didn’t they always?). The worst lies believed to be true (though was it a lie?). Thin, long fingers pushed down the hood of his cloak, and soft, leathery palms cradled the sides of his head as they guided it to face Bad’s. Tears shone down obsidian cheeks. “What happened to you?”

A tangled mess of feeling lodged in Dream’s throat, and heat pricked the edges of hidden eyes. He opened his mouth, but a garbled gasp came out. The long fingers slipped under the edges of his mask.

“May I?” Bad whispered. Dream’s head tilted down and pushed the edges of the mask further up the fingers. The mask was slipped over the young Admin’s head. A small smile crossed the demon’s thin mouth with an echo of a tease. “There you are.”

The kind, remembered softness snapped any control Dream had of himself. He threw himself at Bad and wrapped his friend (his *friend*) in shaky arms. Long fingers dug through the growingly wet blond strand of hair, and a clawed hand settled in between Dream’s shoulder blades.

“I’m sorry,” Bad said in a shaky, tear-torn tone. The fingers in Dream’s hair and on his back curled, but they did not scratch. “I’m so sorry.”

Dream shook his head, but his mouth was too busy sobbing to allow explanations. To let Bad know that it wasn’t the demon’s fault. That Dream was the one—

A familiar long limb pressed and circled around Dream’s waist, and the long hand on his back rubbed in circles. The sobs tearing up Dream’s throat increased in volume. He hated it. Hated how every inch of him was involved in the action of expelling tears, snot, and sorrow

from his body and soul. How he sank deeper into the action and into the steady, silent body cradling his. He—He couldn't—He was the Admin. He was the invincible warrior. He was the villain. He wasn't allowed to cry. (~~He couldn't be weak.~~)

Eventually the gasping sobs softened to stuttering cries and then to hiccupping sniffles. His whole body was held up by the demon's hold, and his eyes kept closing against his will. A leathery texture pressed itself against the side of Dream's forehead.

"I think it's best if we call it a night," Bad said, his voice soft and raw. "Why don't you go to bed? I'll store the food, and we can heat it up in the morning."

Dream nodded and pulled himself together enough to pull away from Bad. Hands caught his face in their hold again as Bad's face became decorated with the smallest of smiles. The demon leaned forward and pressed his mouth against Dream's forehead.

"There," the demon said as he stood while Dream could only stare at him dumbfounded. "That should help you get a good night's sleep. Now get to bed before it kicks in."

Scrambling onto his feet, Dream hurried to the bed not wanting to waste such a precious gift. A night where nightmares could not rise or else meet a demon's wrath. Bad had never—such things weren't meant for Dream. But Bad had. For Dream. The blessing felt warm and settled into his bones.

Dream crawled into his bed and watched as Bad cleaned up and stored the food away. A snapping hiss crackled near his ear. The ghostly glow filled his vision. The hissing continued, and Dream could almost make out words. He tilted his head, and the hissing stopped. The ghostly glow sagged.

Heaviness weighed down his limbs, but he picked one up and held it out to the code. The ghostly glow halted all movement, and Dream felt someone staring at him. His hand was beginning to ache, but he continued to hold it out. The code perked up. A semi-solid hand settled into his. It pinched his palm. Sighing, Dream let go. The code buzzed and grabbed the hand back.

“Okay,” Dream muttered. “Okay.”

He let his hand fall fully into the code’s grip as his head sunk further into his pillow. The hand floated in the code’s grip before it was bent and settled beside Dream’s. The growingly substantial weight made itself comfortable on top of him, and Dream’s lips quirked into a small smile.

He dreamed of the smell of baked bread and sturdy hands pressing warmth into his.

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“So what is this exactly?” Bad asked. The demon’s black and white code hovered at Dream’s side as Dream’s own green kept strengthening the now white and red numbers in front of him. “I can sort of tell you’re messing with code, but I can’t see anything.”

Dream hummed in reply as he focused on a particularly weak string of zeros and ones.

“I wish I could do more,” Bad continued. “Maybe I could talk to SMajor and—”

“You didn’t like being an Admin,” Dream reminded, the string of code glowing green and then becoming a more opaque, settled white edged with red. “You came here to get away from being one.”

“Yeah, but you look like you can use some help. And it wasn’t that bad. A little hard since you know, I wasn’t born an Admin like you or Phil, but I got along just fine.”

Dream flinched, nearly cracking a one in his grasp. He poured more energy into the code (maybe too much given the way the number bounced to join the others). The code shifted away from him. He reached out to pull it back to himself, but black and white code wrapped around his arm’s.



“See? You’re pushing yourself too hard. It’s time for you to take a break. I’ll send a message to SMajor.” Bad’s code settled on Dream’s head’s, automatically bringing the world back into basic view. Worry plagued Bad’s thin smile.

“...there’s still another Admin on the server.”

“Phil, right?” Bad confirmed. “Should I contact him instead? Would be a lot easier seeing as he’s on the same server and everything.”

Dream flinched again and shook his head.

“...Phil’s dead.”

The code beeped and jerked. Bad sagged.

“The Egg?” the demon asked.

Dream’s hands clenched, and his breathing staggered. He moved his mask back onto his face and had it stare at Bad.

“I killed him.”

Bad huffed and somehow rolled his pupil-less eyes.

“And the Egg had nothing to do with that.”

Dream stared at Bad. Bad twitched but stared back. Dream’s shoulders hunched into the sides of his mask.

“...it was hidden throughout his code.”

“And it was threatening you and the three you brokered a deal to protect.”

“I made the deal for Phil too...”

“Phil wouldn’t have wanted to be used against those he loved like that,” Bad said. His voice dropped in volume. “If the Egg felt like it had to have full control then Phil had to have fought him tooth and nail.”

Nodding, Dream felt his nails bite into his palms. “The Egg went down in one hit.”

Now Bad flinched. “Phil—he was a very strong man then.”

Huffing, Dream reached out and tugged at a black sleeve. Soulful white eyes focused on him.

“People have different strengths.”

“Yeah, they do,” Bad chuckled as his lips regained their smile. Long clawed hands ran through Dream’s blond hair. “Remember that, you muffin.”

The echoes of memories long ago retracted biting nails from sensitive palms.

The code hissed and buzzed, catching both men’s attention. It then moved over the furnace.

“Oh, right,” Bad said hurrying over to the furnace. “Lunchtime! You want steak again, mysterious fragmented code?”

“Pretty sure it’s Tommy,” Dream said as he stood to join Bad by the furnace. “Or what the Egg left of him.”

“Tommy? Why Tommy and not Phil?”

“It got my attention by tripping me down the stairs and throwing my pickaxe across the floor. Also, I’m pretty sure all that hissing is its attempts at cursing me out.”

“Huh. That makes sense,” Bad said. He turned to the code fully. “Also, language!”

The code hissed harder, and Dream could swear it was saying the f word over and over.

“Fine. Then you can get your own steak,” Bad said calmly. The code stilled and then hissed harder. Definitely more than the f word now. Bad turned away from it and to Dream. “What do you want Dream?”

“...stew?”

“Okay. What kind?”

“...do we have any rabbit?”

“Um...,” Bad dragged out as he opened the chest next to him. “Maybe—no, we’re out. How about I make you mushroom stew and then we can go out and hunt for some rabbit for dinner?”

Shaking his head, Dream said, “I have to finish working on possible Tommy’s server interactions.”

“But you’ve been working on it all morning,” Bad near whined. “Getting your mind off it might let your mind come up with a faster way to help it. Right, possible Tommy?”

Bad muttered something in the direction of the code Dream couldn’t quite catch. The code perked and then sagged before the growingly clear outline of its head bobbed up and down.

“See? It agrees with me.”

“...okay,” Dream begrudgingly agreed. Bad’s smile grew into a grin, and Dream noted a steak handed to the sagging code. It snatched the steak up and swallowed it. Barely there hands stretched out to Bad who handed it another one. “Did you bribe it to agree with you?”

“No,” Bad said in a stilted high pitched. “Why would you think that?”

The code poked Bad, and the demon handed him yet another steak.

“...I have no idea.”

That evening, Dream collapsed into bed. The code settled on the other side of the bed feeling like a back pressed against him. As his eyes closed, he made out Bad in the bed across from his before the demon faded into the shadows.

Dream dreamt of hard fingers gently tapping code and snorting snores.

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White and red code opened and closed at Dream’s instruction, and Dream nodded.

“Try,” he commanded. Staticky sounds shrilled through the clearing they had settled in. Bad had insisted on spending more time above ground. Something about Dream needing more sun. Bad had taken the opportunity to go off hunting while Dream finished his session with the code.

Dream fiddled with a faded zero and one and then nodded. “Again.”

“...f...you...,” the code spoke through harsh static.

“Definitely Tommy,” Dream muttered. The code hissed.

“...f...ou...b...”

“Careful or Bad’ll stop giving you steaks.”

The code gave a yawning buzz and grumpily sagged. Apparently it could emote more now.

A recognizable beeping came from a nearby chest. Dream stared at it before heading over to it. The chest was one Bad made for his supplies. The beeping stopped, but Dream peeked into the chest. Several piles of meat and bowls of stew lined the inside, but a strange icon flashed red in the corner. Bad’s communicator.

Dream remembered his own stored in a chest back home, a perk of being an Admin. Most people couldn’t part with the device without consequences. Dream had not wanted to see the blank screen, so he would have left it consequences or not. Bad must have retained enough Admin powers to store his temporarily.

His fingers drifted over the flashing white device. They curled into themselves but then straightened and grabbed the object. Messages flashed across the screen.

A smug buzz sounded behind Dream, and the Admin glared at the ghostly outline of Tommy behind him. The code pointed at the communicator aggressively and hissed another curse at Dream. A frown pressed Dream's lips together.

"Shut up," Dream growled. "Bad would want to know—" The words caught in his throat. Would he? Would Bad want to know that people were looking for him? What they were saying? Why they wanted to find him? Bad had left his communicator for a reason. Dream looked down.

*Skeppy: Open contract to find Bad and bring him back. He may have left the server. Two blocks of diamonds for his return.*

The message blared red. A server-wide, alerted announcement. Fingers tightened around the rounded device. What did that mean? What did they want with Bad? Cautiously, Dream pulled up the latest private message.

*Anfrost whispers to you: Just wanted to warn you.*

Dream stiffened and then sped to the next message.

*Anfrost whispers to you: We're headed your way.*

His hand shook. No. He couldn't let them near Bad. They weren't forcing the man back. He wouldn't let them blame Bad for all the harm done on the server.

*Anfrost whispers to you: Dream's group found out about my compass.*

The communicator nearly slipped out of Dream's hands. Dream's group? Was it *them* or—? No. Bad was likely enemy number one right now. They had to move. Maybe to another server. The code floated over Dream's shoulder and peered down at the communicator. Dream shoved it back into the chest. He then blinked the code into clarity and dug his finger's code into it.

He ran along each line of code, each zero and one, pouring energy and bits of shattering green ones and zeros into the mix, and praying that it would be enough. That the code could heal and solidify on its own. It wouldn't survive a trip across servers.

A yell broke through his concentration. He was tackled hard away from Tommy's code and jarred out of his coded vision. A blurry leafy ceiling mocked him from above.

"What were you doing!?" Bad yelled. A lanky, heavy body pinned his to the floor in the remnants of a tackle. Bad pushed himself up and scrambled to Dream's side. Dream would have scooted away from the looming figure if his whole body didn't ache. Blurry white eyes ran up and down his form, and Dream closed his own because the motion was too much for his brain to follow. It throbbed and spiked with pain. "You muffinhead! You nearly undid your own code. That's it! I'm talking to SMajor right now. I can't trust you to do this to yourself!"

"He found your f— communicator in your chest!" came a clear annoying voice. The pain in Dream's head spiked and worsened at it and the corresponding yell of "language!"

"Wait," Bad said in a lower voice. "My communicator? But why would he—"

"It was f— flashing red, and Dream looked at it and then the b— f— lunged at me and—and he f— violated me!"

"Language!" Bad snapped. A whimper escaped Dream, and his body curled into itself. A hand settled on his head, and his breath staggered and scratched his throat. But his hair remained unpulled. Instead long fingers gently ran through it and soft shushing accompanied the soothing motion. Bad continued in a lower voice. "What do you mean he violated you?"

"What I f— said!" Tommy yelled. Dream cringed, and Bad let out some more "sh's." He then growled at Tommy.

“Lower your volume.” Silence followed the low, dark threat. The cool, leathery fingers halted at the top of Dream’s neck, right under his hair. They rubbed feather-soft circles at the base of his skull. Somehow, the pain lessened. Bad’s scariest cheerful tone continued, “Now let’s try again. You were about to explain why you felt like the man who nearly tore himself to pieces fixing your code ‘violated’ you.”

“He jammed his code into mine,” the teen said with a vacant shiver in his voice. “He ran all over it like—like the f—”

The teen’s voice broke.

“Oh,” Bad said. The fingers halted and after a second pulled away. A whine built in the back of Dream’s mouth, but he held it in place. They should pull away. What had he been thinking? “Come here.”

“What—No. I’m not a f— child! I don’t need your f— up attempts at comfort.”

“Language,” complained Bad in a lighter tone. “And it doesn’t matter how old you are. Everyone needs a hug now and then. So. Come. Here.”

A mutter, and then silence. Dream managed to pry apart his eyelids. A white and red blob hugged a black one. The pain receded, and the scene focused. A ghostly Tommy clung to Bad tightly. The receding pain couldn’t hide the pressure building in Dream’s chest.

“There,” said Bad as he pulled away from the teen. Tommy’s arms jerkily returned back to his sides. The demon turned to Dream, and the small smile and gentle gaze fell on him and relieved the heavy ache in his chest. “Feeling better?”

Gingerly Dream nodded.

“Good. I’m glad to see that worked,” Bad said. He slapped Dream’s arm lightly as his smile shifted to a frown. “Don’t ever do that again. You were glitching out.”



“...sorry,” Dream whispered.

“You should be,” said Bad as he stood, looping an arm under Dream’s and dragging him up with him. “Now you’re going to rest in that bed until dinner, ‘kay?”

“No,” Dream rasped. He wiggled in Bad’s hold, but the demon kept a solid hold on him. “We have to leave.”

“Leave? Where to? And why?”

“They’re coming.” Dream struggled harder. Bad held him too tightly.

“Who’s they?—hey stop that! We’re not going anywhere until you explain,” Bad grumbled. Dream let himself go limp. “That’s better. Now let’s try this again.”

Green eyes glared over Dream’s shoulder at the demon. Bad smiled widely, shadowed fangs outlined perfectly.

“You can do it. Words aren’t that hard.”

Dream let out a grumbling groan, and Bad placed the Admin’s limp body onto a bed he took out of his inventory.

“So why do we need to leave?”

“Bet it has to do with whatever he saw in your f— communicator,” Tommy said as he sat mid-air over Bad’s shoulder.

“Language!” Bad scolded. “And not now. Dream needs to tell us why we need to leave.”

*Why* they needed to leave—Dream’s breaths came out a little easier. He swallowed and opened his mouth.

“They found out Antfrost has a compass.”

“Alright. But who’s they?”

“Antfrost sent you a message.”

Bad waited, but Dream didn’t say anything else. Bad would know who Antfrost mean. (~~Dream didn’t want to know.~~)

“I’m going to have to look at my communicator, aren’t I?” Bad finally said in a sigh.

“Guess so,” Tommy said floating over Bad’s head. “How can you leave it in a chest like that?”

“Former Admin privileges,” Bad said as he moved towards the chest that held the communicator. “Speaking of, do you have yours on you?”

“Why would I? I’m practically a ghost, and before whatever the h— Dream did, not even that.”

“Language,” Bad muttered as he pulled out the communicator. “It’s probably back with your body.”

“My body!?” Tommy cried, flailing out of his reclining position.

“Yeah. They buried it next to—” The end of the sentence abruptly stopped the moment Bad glanced down at the messages. Dream flinched as flashing red bounced off Bad’s face. Pain crumpled the demon’s face, and he pocketed the device. He plastered a grin on and faced Dream. “So where do you want to go?”

“Off the server,” Dream said softly. “I know someone who’ll let us on their server.”

“You’re aware that once you leave, this won’t be your server anymore?”

Dream shrugged as he struggled to sit back up. “It hasn’t been for a long time.”

“All right then, off to the nearest stronghold we go,” Bad said, rifling through the chests. “We have enough food. We can find Endermen along the way. Wait. Do you have blaze rods?”

Discreetly slipping his hand into the code, Dream pulled out various blaze rods. Tommy stared at him, but Bad nodded.

“How’s a bout we eat and then head out?”

---

Tommy grumbled but floated up higher into the air. Dream watched him go up until the teen floated in direct view of the sun.

“Look at that. He does know how to follow directions,” Bad said with a smirk. Dream gave a small one back and slipped his mask back on his face.

“We have to hurry. We don’t know how close they are.”

“Very few people have any chance of catching up to us Dream. And I know at least two of them are staying put in the Greater SMP at the moment.”

“...he’ll miss you.”

“Given what he said last time we talked, it’ll be a while before he gets to that point,” Bad said. The demon looked older as he spoke. “He’ll miss you too.”

“He’s had time to miss me.”

“I told you. It takes a while for him to get to that point,” Bad said, a faint cheer chasing away years from the demon’s face. “At least he isn’t offering diamonds for my head.”

“...we have the worst luck when it comes to best friends,” Dream said tentatively.

“Maybe,” Bad conceded. The heavy weight returned to Bad’s shoulders. “But he...he has good reason. Sapnap—I raised him better than that.”

“...he’s got good reason too.”

“Dream,” came Bad’s exasperated tone. “I’ve already told you, just because you said you hated him—”

“Bad! Big D! We have a problem!” screamed Tommy as he dive-bombed towards them.

“What?” Dream demanded. “What happened?”

“I think,” Tommy started and then gasped out a breath. “I think—I think they saw me.”

“Did you stay in the direct line of the sun?”

“Of course I did! You wouldn’t f— shut up about it!” Tommy cried. They both ignored the faint cry of “language” as they glared at each other. Tommy looked away first. “I hate that f— mask...”

“How far away are they?” asked Dream.

“I dunno. Do I look like I walk around with a magical measuring stick that can tell me how many blocks away people are?”

Dream snorted before turning to grab Bad’s hand and drag him into a run.

“Ack!” Bad yelped. He soon matched Dream’s pace. “Warn a guy next time!”

“Who?” Dream shot back at Tommy as the Admin dodged another tree. The ghost lagged behind though it was floating towards them through the trees.

“Slow down and I’ll tell you!” yelled Tommy as he fell further and further behind.

Dream took stock of the thick trees and the ghostly teen wrestling his way through them. His pace slowed a step and a half. Bad stayed next to him. The ghostly teen finally reached them.

“Now,” Dream demanded.

“I’m not sure who all exactly. There were five or six people from what I saw, but one of them was the Blade. He’s the one that saw me.”

“Technoblade? Then the group might be—”

“We don’t know that,” Dream cut Bad off. Techno would not be looking for Dream. Not with good intentions (not after Phil). And blocks of diamonds were not unappealing for him. He squeezed Bad’s hand. “We keep running.”

“Got it,” Bad said, allowing Dream’s pace to quicken. Half-consciously, he grabbed a ghostly hand. He didn’t want to slow down again.

“DREAM!”

The call boomed through the trees behind him. Dream dared a glance backwards. Red and pink blinked through some of the leaves further back. The red and pink figure became clear through the foliage as he leapt to a higher branch.

“Dream! Please stop!”

The voice did not belong to the man boosting his speed through the trees. A lighter pink peeked through the green further back. Dream’s stride stuttered. And then the red and pink figure landed on the ground a dozen blocks back.

“Found him,” Techno called over his shoulder without slowing his pace. Red eyes pierced Dream’s mask. Dream faced forward and lengthened his steps. Stopping—he couldn’t stop. “It would be in your best interest to stop, Dream! It’ll only be worse later!”

Dream’s lungs burned, but his feet near glided through the jagged ground. Every tree was avoided and put between them and the warrior behind them. Bad stumbled, and Dream adjusted to keep him from falling over. He tried to keep Tommy from ramming into a tree before remembering the teen could phase through it. A desert appeared through the trees ahead. They wouldn’t make it. He had never had so many people with him when he ran before (attachments, as always).

Yanking Bad ahead and Tommy into Bad, Dream let go and ran to the direct left. Away from Bad and Tommy. He watched, and the piglin hybrid turned to follow his path. He picked up the pace.

“Dream! Wait!” Bad called, but Dream didn’t look back. He caught a lower tree branch and swung upwards. His feet landed on a higher branch, and with a twist he pushed his weight on it and dashed up and forward. He reached the top of the next tree and jumped to the next one. A frustrated grunt sounded too close behind him, but no more cries came from Bad’s direction.

Gauging the distance to the edge of the forest, Dream jumped to a tree parallel to that edge. A splash of purple particles appeared in front of him, and his feet barely landed on their designated branch. A dark body slammed into him.

“𐐇𐐇𐐇 𐐇𐐇𐐇,” the head pressed painfully in between Dream’s chest and collarbone. The lanky body had Dream pinned against the tree trunk. The teen’s breath stuttered hard enough to make Dream’s ribs rattle. “You said you’d teach us how to fly a boat. You—you aren’t going anywhere.”

“Told you it would be worse,” said Techno in a snort as he landed on branch below them. “Now the kid’s not letting go until he’s cinched his grip permanently into your torso. Or maybe, if we’re lucky, he’ll listen when I tell him that being up this high on a thin branch like that isn’t a good idea.”

Ranboo moved to peer around Dream. His weight shifted far enough to the side to slip forward and down, but Dream quickly adjusted the teen and regained their equilibrium. Black and white cheeks glowed faintly pink.

“Sorry,” Ranboo whispered. He looked up at Dream’s mask and began to move again before stilling as the branch creaked. The pink darkened. “Do you—can you get us out of here?”

Dream’s mask pointed at the piglin below. Techno shrugged.

“I’m not sure how much help I’ll be from down here.”

Dream stared at the warm, red eyes. He then shifted Ranboo carefully off him. With a sudden swing, he half-tossed, half-dropped Ranboo into Techno. The piglin hybrid caught the teen easily. Probably because the teen’s tail had wrapped itself around one of Dream’s wrist and slowed the teen’s descent. The long limb stretched between Techno and Dream.

“You coming down or what?”

With a huff, Dream carefully maneuvered himself off the branch and onto one near Techno and Ranboo. The teen immediately jumped to a closer branch to Dream, and the piglin hybrid jumped to the ground. Still tied to the enderman hybrid, Dream took several smaller jumps before landing back on the forest floor.

“Are you here to capture Bad?”

Blood red eyes pierced his mask again.

“...I’d ask if you were kidding, but we both know you’re not,” Techno huffed. He stepped forward and closer to Dream. Ranboo’s tail remained wrapped around Dream’s wrist, and Dream forced himself to still. “Let’s make one thing clear.”

The piglin hybrid stopped directly in front of Dream and loomed the couple of inches difference between them. Hands shot out from the red cape and snapped on either side of Dream’s head. And then a hard head smashed against his.

Pain erupted behind Dream’s mask and in his skull as the piglin hybrid moved back.

“Whatever happened in that other timeline, whatever you think you know about us, get it out of your head. Because whatever happened over there doesn’t have to do with now. Here, you’re part of the Syndicate. And there’s no way of getting out of it now. If I have to, I’ll put you on a leash.”



“He’s right,” Ranboo said grinning beside Dream. The teen’s cheek rubbed against the side of Dream’s mask and managed to tickle the flesh under it. “You’re stuck with us now. Even if we have to tie you down.”

“That’s kidnapping,” Dream said, the comment slipping past the growing numbness.

“So? Who’s going to stop us?” Techno challenged. “Come on, nerd. Niki’s likely caught up to the other two you picked up and she has a few choice words for you too.”

“ $\Lambda \ominus \Phi \sqsubseteq \mathfrak{I} \wedge \sigma \sqsubseteq \Psi \mathfrak{H} \ominus \omega \mathfrak{z} \wedge \Phi \mathfrak{H} \omega \mathfrak{z} \Psi \neg \Delta \omega$ ,” screeched Ender as he followed Techno and pulled Dream forward. Dream felt himself frown and smoothly fall into step behind them.

Absently his free hand reached up to rub his mask into his forehead that still throbbed. The smooth surface pressing against his skull didn’t help, so he moved his mask to the side. Fingers traced his tender forehead.

“Are you okay?” warbled Ranboo, slowing down with worry across his features. Black and white hands rose to around head level for Dream.

“I think...,” Dream said, soft and on the beginning of a wondrous gasp. “Maybe...?”

## Chapter End Notes

$\mathfrak{H} \ominus \Pi \mathcal{U} \mathfrak{I} \Delta \neg$ . – You liar.

$\Lambda \ominus \Phi \sqsubseteq \mathfrak{I} \wedge \sigma \sqsubseteq \Psi \mathfrak{H} \ominus \omega \mathfrak{z} \wedge \Phi \mathfrak{H} \omega \mathfrak{z} \Psi \neg \Delta \omega$  - Nothing he doesn't deserve

...am I forgiven for the last chapter yet?

# Maybe This Time

## Chapter Summary

The Syndicate takes Dream home.

## Chapter Notes

I think this chapter might be too fluffy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A small body tackled Dream's leg with a force only slightly less than Ender's earlier one.

"Papa!" came the delighted, wet squeak. Tiny arms released Dream's leg to stretch his arms upwards. "Papa! Papa! Papapapapapa!"

Dream bent down and picked the little piglin up. Peace immediately smacked his head into Dream's mask and then squealed in pain. The mask slid to the side of Dream's head as he shushed and rocked the baby (or was it child now?) piglin. His forehead softly settled on the sniffling child's, and after a silent moment, Peace pressed hard back.

"Papa," the tiny piglin began again followed by a familiar grunt. Dream tensed and then sighed, cradling the tiny piglin's body closer.

"...you've been around Techno too long."

"As I recall, I'm not the one who taught him that," Techno said from behind Dream.

“Yeah, but I doubt he would remember that without help,” Dream grumbled as he twist his head to glare at Techno without breaking contact with Peace.

“Don’t look at me,” said Techno. “I’m above such language.”

“Sure you are,” Niki scoffed. Dream pulled away slightly from Peace to see her enter the clearing. Peace squealed an objection and headbutted the side of Dream’s cheek. Dream flinched at the force, and Peace huffed before settling his head on Dream’s shoulder pressed into the side of the Admin’s neck.

Brown eyes glittered at the action even as the pink-haired woman neared. She stopped right in front of Dream.

“I want you to know the only reason I’m not hitting you is because you’re holding Peace,” Niki clarified. She smiled warmly, and those glittering brown eyes gained a glassy, reflective glow. “Don’t ever scare us like that again.”

“Pretty sure he won’t,” said Bad taking a place behind her. His white grin cracked the bottom of his face wide open. “I wondered why he hadn’t left the server before I found him.”

“I was fixing Tommy,” Dream said.

“Don’t blame this one me,” said Tommy. He floated over Bad and Niki until he stared down at Dream. “It was a long time before I found you. I’m not exactly sure how long since I wasn’t, you now, in the best state to tell time or anything. But it was f— long enough for you to have left the server.”

“Language! And it took me over a month to get here. Given how good Dream is in getting to the End when he wants to...,” Bad trailed off, his grin somehow wider. Many gazes fell on Dream, and his shoulders pushed into his neck as much as they could with a child snuggled into it. Bad finally continued, “It’s almost as if he were waiting for something. Or someone. Or various someones.”

Dream scooted backwards, but a tail remained wrapped around his wrist. He eyed Ranboo as the enderman hybrid smiled beatifically at him. The red and green eyes blinked.

“{Ξω ΔΩΠΛΠ ΞΔΔω {ΦΩ≠ωΠ ΗΩΠ,” Ender whistled in a hiss, too amused. “ΞΠΦ ΐΦ’{ ϑΩΩΠ ΦΩ ϑΛΩΔ {Ξω ΛωΔω≠ ΛωωΠωΠ ΦΩ ϑωΦ ΐΛΩΩΛΔωΠ.”

Dream frowned at the enderman hybrid who hissed tauntingly.

“ΨΩ ΦΞω ≠ωΩΩΩΠ, {Ξω ΔΩΛ’Φ ΛωΦ ΗΩΠ ΛωΔΔω. ΛΩΦ ΔΐΦΞΩΠΦ Δ ΨΐΩΞΦ. ΔΛΠ ΗΩΠ ΔΩΠΛΠΛ’Φ ΔΔΛΦ ΦΩ ΞΠ≠Φ Ξω≠ ηΩ≠ω, ΔΩΠΛΠ ΗΩΠ?”

With a small puff of air, Dream turned away. Ender crackled a chuckle, and Bad stared in the teen’s direction.

“Anyone want to translate that?” Bad asked.

“You’d have to ask Dream. He’s the only one who fully understands Enderspeak,” Niki explained. “But if I had to guess, I’d say that Ender is taunting Dream with the fact that he can’t leave us in the dust so easily.”

“No offense, but Dream’s not the easiest to catch when he doesn’t want to be.”

“Ah, but Ender told Ranboo that the server herself will stop Dream if he tries to leave.”

“Servers can grow very attached to their Admins,” Bad agreed. His head suddenly snapped towards Ender. “Wait. The kid’s name is Ender, right? But I’ve heard someone call him Ranboo too before. Or maybe that was someone who looks like him? Does he have a twin brother?”

“Nah,” Techno drawled. “They’re both.”

“Both?” Bad asked in the same voice he took when Dream explained how to fly in a boat.

“His mob side is very entuned with the server,” Niki said quickly. “And for some reason he’s taken a consciousness of his own. So Ranboo and Ender are two people in one body?”

The gazes turned briefly to Ender. The enderman hybrid shrugged and closed his eyes. Ranboo shifted, and red and green eyes skittered along the grassy floor.

“That’s...the best way to describe it,” Ranboo said quietly. “He’s me, and I’m him. But we’re different. He’s mainly here to help Dream take care of the server. I’m just a by-product of the server needing Ender to have a player-based code.”

This time Dream’s head whipped around to stare openly at Ranboo. Words bubbled up his throat, but a new voice cut him off.

“Finally I caught up with you guys,” the new voice said out of breath. A familiar cat hybrid stepped into the clearing from the direction Techno had originally come from. A dark tan tail twitched nervously behind him. He lifted a pawed hand up and twitched it a bit. “Hi, Dream.”

Dream tilted his head down and to the side away from Ant and nodded. He struggled to get the mask fully back on his face with the child in his arms.

“So...um...i-it’s a long time no see,” the cat hybrid continued. No one else spoke. Dream wished they would. “I...I thought it was only fair to come with Techno and them to...to bring this back.”

His mask securely on his face, Dream turned to find Ant much closer than he was before. Ant’s whole body fluidly jerked, and the former hunter took half a step backwards. His tail

stilled, and he stared straight into Dream's mask. His hands held out a familiar compass.

"I thought you would like it back."

Dream stared at the compass and then lifted his gaze to Ant. The cat hybrid twitch but he stood in place.

"Thank you," Dream whispered. He took the compass from Ant's open hands. The cat hybrid nodded and stepped back.

"I guess...I'll go back now," Ant said unsteadily. The cat hybrid jerkily headed towards the trees.

"Ant," Dream called past the uncertainty clogging his throat. "See you later?"

The cat hybrid perked up in a quick jerk of a motion. A smile twisted under his muzzle.

"See you later, Dream!" he called back with a true wave. He pounced and ran into the woods. Dream's chest expanded fully as he watched his hunter go.

"...well that went well," Niki said, bringing Dream's attention back to her. "He ended up being very helpful. Took forever to get him to agree to let us use that compass. He only agreed if he was the one carrying it and pointing out the direction. He didn't seem to trust any of us with it."

"None of us would give those up willingly," Bad said. The demon gazed at the compass in Dream's hand with downturned glowing eyes. "It's our connection to one of our best friends."

"What are you going to do with it now?" asked Ranboo, peeking at it over the shoulder Peace wasn't using as a pillow. The tail squeezed around the wrist Dream was using to hold Peace.

“I mean, you could destroy it. *Or...* you could give it to one of us. Just in case. For emergencies.”

“Someone who can catch up and stop you from doing anything stupid, preferably,” Techno added, blood red eyes focused on the compass. Dream looked between the enderman and piglin hybrid.

“That is a good idea,” he said slowly. He held the compass out to Niki. The woman’s gaze flicked between the compass and Dream.

“...you sure?”

“I am,” Dream said. Moving Peace into a more comfortable position, Dream leaned in Niki’s direction. She smiled and moved to take the compass. Taking a deep breath, Dream stepped a full step forward and met her forehead with his for the lightest of taps. He nearly shoved the compass into Niki’s stunned hands, grateful for his mask for more than one reason. “...we’re family.”

Niki gripped the compass. Tears fell into and down her wide, toothy grin.

“We are.”

“You’re sad,” said another voice. Dream spun immediately to find where it was coming from. Ghostbur floated over their heads with Tommy. He descended and held dripping, blue wool out to Niki. “Here, have some blue.”

“No, thank you,” Niki said, the grin still splitting her face. She held the compass to her heart. “This is all the blue I need.”

“But it isn’t even blue,” Ghostbur half-whined. He spun towards Dream. “Would you like some blue?”

“...it doesn’t work for me,” Dream whispered shakily. He stepped away from the haunting ghost.

“Okay,” Ghostbur chirped. He held it out to Techno. “Blue?”

Techno rolled his eyes but took it.

“What’s he doing way out here?” Bad asked as he maneuvered to stand next to Dream.

“He’s been following us,” said Ranboo as he also moved closed to Dream’s side. “He said he had to make sure we found Dream.”

“Dad said so,” Ghostbur confirmed. “It’s in my book. He came to me in a dream to tell me to help Techno find Dream. It was funny. But I remember what Dad said. Dream’s good and needs blue. Or maybe he said Dream’s blue and needs some good? But that doesn’t make sense because blue is good!”

“Phil?” Dream whispered, daring to interrupt the ghost.

“Yep. Dad said you need...something,” Ghostbur said, his translucent brow furrowing. “Mm...probably blue. I like blue. Do you like blue?”

Ignoring the ghostly ramblings, Dream closed his eyes and focused. They opened, but every one and zero surrounding him was whole and had its place. Even Tommy’s code that glowed faintly red and white. Dream frowned and closed his eyes. Techno snorted.

“Looking for someone?” Techno said. Dream glanced at the piglin hybrid and kept his limbs as loose as possible.



“I thought Phil might be—”

“He’s gone,” Techno said flatly, and Dream’s body braced. The piglin hybrid huffed and looked away from Dream. “He’s with his wife now.”

“Wait. Phil has a wife!?” Tommy cried, zooming down to eye level with Techno. “No f— way! Does he really?”

“Language!” Bad barked, but Tommy kept his attention on Techno.

“Yeah. He’s married to some woman who calls herself Lady Death or something. I dunno. Never met her. For a long time I didn’t think she was real, but apparently she is and she took the last of Phil’s code off the server because she deemed it too dangerous to let him stay,” Techno said. One shoulder sagged up and down in an attempt at a casual shrug. “Guess he had no objection other than to leave us messages via his mostly dead son.”

“Mumza’s great!” Ghostbur cheered, floating almost into Tommy. “She can destroy a whole server in under five minutes! She’s terrifying. And she loves Dad tons. She even likes me sometimes too!”

“Aren’t you her kid?” Bad asked, his glowing mouth frowning.

“Sometimes! Most of the time Dad said he got me from a refrigerator.”

“Ooookay,” Bad said, reaching out and grabbing the side of Dream’s cloak and stepping slightly between the two. He pointed a wide grin through Ghostbur to Techno. “So where we going?”

“Home hopefully,” Niki said, walking past Dream and Bad. But not before skipping and briefly knocking her forehead against the top of Dream’s mask. “It’s like ten thousand blocks away, so we’d better get going.”

Dream started forward, but both the tail on his wrist and the grip on his cloak pulled him back. Dream glanced at both in pointed exasperation. Bad's grin turned sheepish, and he let go. Ranboo's face gazed back impassively.

"Ender isn't letting go any time soon," Ranboo said evenly. "And neither am I."

Dream gave another sigh and waved forward with his free hand. Ranboo strode forward, and Dream took quicksteps to keep up.

"So where is 'home' anyway?" Tommy asked as he floated back over Dream's head.

"Dream's house in the mountain," Niki replied as they followed her lead. "You remember—wait, we brought you there unconscious so unless you woke up when Dream—"

"Nope. Don't remember you bringing me to any mountain house," Tommy interrupted quickly. He paused. "Hold on a second. You mean the barrier house that Dream kicked me out of?"

"...I offered you tea," Dream pointed out.

"You were a smug p— about it too," Tommy muttered. He ignored Bad's scolding outburst. "You only did it because I'm f— British."

"You like tea," Dream defended.

"Yeah, but there was little chance you knew that already, b—"

"Language! You know what, why do I even bother?" Bad grumbled from where he kept pace next to Dream. "I guess Dream knew about your love of tea from the other timeline anyway."

“It’s not like I knew about that back then,” Tommy snipped. “And from what the—” He gulped and pushed forward. “The f— spoiled piece of undone poultry remembered about the other timeline, that’s probably a good thing.”

For an instant, Dream halted and caused Ranboo to stumble. Bad stopped and turned back towards Dream.

“You saw it?” Dream asked.

“Bits and pieces mostly,” Tommy said, floating back down and facing the leaf-blocked sky. Streams of sunbeams mottled his faraway face. “The f— b— of less-than-a-chicken was trying to get Karl to do something to get the timeline back to what it was. It didn’t like that it couldn’t get its code into you before your deal fell apart. I think that the extremes you took in the other timeline to protect the server scared the thing. Especially since you suddenly had reason to f—

care for the server again.” Blue eyes pierced Dream’s mask. “You’re f— up. You know that?”

“ዙፀብ ቀፀሉንቅ ፍሠቅ ቅፀ ነቀዙ ቅፎቀቅ, ቢላፍሉቀቅሠፍቢህ ሰጥሠቅ፤ሊ,” Ender hissed and howled, a sword pulled out of his inventory and in his hand. “ፍፀቁሠ ቀፀሊላ ፎሠሠ ነፀ ፤ ሰቀላ ነሠሠ ፤ፍ ቁዙ ነቀቀላ ነቢፍፍ ፍፎፀንቅ, ፀላ ፤ፍ ፤ ፎቀፍሠ ቅፀ ፍፀላቀ ቀ ሊሠፈ ፀሊሠ.”

“What’d you say to me, b—?” Tommy growled and floating down to Ender. Dream stepped between them.

"I know, Tommy," Dream said softly before he turned to a hissing Ender. "He's right."

“Yep. Sure he is,” Bad quipped, acid in his tone and arms akimbo. His tail slapped the ground once loudly. Dream winced. “He’s right. You’re messed up. And so am I. So is Techno and Niki and probably Ranboo. Ender definitely is. And so is Tommy. We’re all messed up, and

we've all messed up. That's why we're here though. Because we know that and we want to get better. Isn't that right, everyone?"

Bad looked around with a sharp grin and narrowed crescent eyes. No one disagreed with him. Even Tommy stayed silent. Bad's black face softened

"We made mistakes, and we're going to make more. But we want to do better, especially by each other. So it doesn't matter that we messed up. It matters that we keep trying."

"...but can we do that if we were messed up in the first place?" Tommy whispered.

"Of course," Bad cheerfully. "We just need help. And that's what we're going to give each other. 'Cause that's what a family does."

"Family, huh?" Techno said.

"Well Dream's been my family for a while. And Tommy too now," said Bad. His tail twitched. He kept his gaze focused on where he was going. "And you're all Dream's family too. And from what I got, you all seem at least fond of Tommy. So when I said 'we,' I meant in regards to Dream and Tommy obviously—"

"Look, we're all tired. Let's find a village to rest before continuing this conversation," Niki interrupted. She smiled back at the demon. "But for the record, you're family now too, Bad."

"Oh," Bad let out softly. He gave her an awkward, warm smile back. "Thank you."

"Yay. The guy who literally spread the undone omelet across the server is now part of our party," Techno huffed. "Lucky us."

Bad flinched, and Dream threw a masked glare over his shoulder at the warrior. Techno stared blankly back.

“Hey, why don’t I use my f— awesome ghost powers to fly up and find a village nearby?” asked Tommy quickly inserting himself between Dream and Techno.

“That’s a good idea, Tommy,” Dream said quietly. Tommy grinned.

“D— straight. I’m full of great ideas,” Tommy crowed and soared straight up into the sky as if he was swimming in it.

“That looks like fun! Wait for me Ghost Friend!” Ghostbur yelled as he soared into the sky after Tommy.

“I know where the nearest village is,” Niki admitted as she kept leading them through the forest. “But we’ll follow him just in case.”

The red and white dot in the sky waved at them through a gap in the trees and pointed in the direction Niki was already going. With an affectionate shake of her head, Niki more pointedly walked in the proper direction.

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Red and green eyes stood their ground against twin green.

“Ender, we need to sleep,” Dream repeated. The tail remained wrapped around Dream’s wrist.

“△Λ⌘ ∫ Λωω⌘ Φ◊ ∩ Δσρω ∫∩×ω ∫◊∩ ⌘◊Λ'Φ σ◊ ΔΛ∫ΔΞω×ω,” Ender double-downed.

“The room isn’t big enough,” Dream reiterated.

“Yeah, b—b—. Get lost,” Tommy said.

“Tommy, you’re not staying either,” Dream sighed.

“But what if my code f— unravels?” Tommy demanded. Dream’s green gaze slipped up towards the ghostly teen. “What? It’s a valid concern. It’s not like you’ve experience fixing someone’s badly f— up code before. There could be side-effects. I could turn into chicken or a villager or anything!”

“ቅዳሳህ ልህ” ብሎ ለሁሉም ሰው ለመናገር ሰላም ማድረግ ጀመረ። “እኔም ለሁሉም ሰው ለመናገር ሰላም ማድረግ ጀመርኩ።” ለሁሉም ሰው ለመናገር ሰላም ማድረግ ጀመሩ።

“Speak Human, b—b—,” Tommy snarled.

“Look, neither of those things are going to happen,” Dream said in exasperation. “And this room is too small for five people. Ender, if you’re that worried, you can get Techno to install an alert on my bed like he did for—” He paused pained and restarted, “He can install the alert and he’ll be after me in seconds. I can even show him how to get it to ping on your communicator. Tommy, if you feel anything strange, you can come into the room and wake me up.”

“But I don’t want to stay in the same room as f— Ghostbur! He’s f— weird,” Tommy whined.

“Then you can share with Ranboo and Ender,” Dream said.

“No. No f— way I’m staying with b—b— and his annoying weak half or whatever.”



“All righty, then. Looks like we’ll have to come up with a clever solution.”

“You’re not giving up your bed, Bad,” said Dream quickly. Bad blinked at Dream’s vehemence but nodded. He probably didn’t want to let Dream out of his sight either.

“That’s fine, because I have a better idea,” Bad said, swinging an axe out of his inventory. He began chopping at the wood blocks making the back wall. The dark ocean beyond the cliff dwelling came into view. Bad started placing and building floor further out over it. “Looks like this villager is getting a free upgrade to his house. Don’t worry. I’ll check with him later to see if he wants to keep it or not.”

“I hear chopping,” Niki said from the doorway. She stared at Bad doubling the floor space. “What’s going on?”

“The boys both wanted to stay in the same room as Dream, so I’m making the room bigger so they’ll stop arguing and let Dream and the rest of us get some sleep.”

“I see,” Niki said, briefly looking at both who were now on either side of Dream. “Can you make room for one more? Wouldn’t hurt to have another functioning adult in the room.”

“Of course not,” Bad said from where he had been building new wall. He moved over to the edge of the floor and added more.

“Why is there free labor going on?” Techno said as he peered over Niki’s shoulder.

“Ender, Ranboo, and Tommy want to keep an eye on Dream, so Bad made the room big enough so that they can stay here too,” Niki explained.

“Hyeh?” Techno said, staring at the two teens.



“For the record, I’m here so that Dream can keep an eye on me, not the other way around,” Tommy grumbled.

“Right,” said Niki with a small head shake. “My mistake.”

“Well, if everybody else is going to be in here, might as well make it a full sleepover then,” Techno said. Dream shook his head.

“Having everyone in the same room wouldn’t be a...great idea,” said Dream, glancing back deliberately at Bad and then at Techno. Blood red eyes widened slightly before narrowing.

“Sure. Keeping all your eggs in one basket and all that,” Techno said. He backed out of the doorway. “Ghostbur and I will remain across the hall just in case.”

Techno gave Niki a wordless look, and Niki nodded. The piglin closed the door behind him. Dream’s shoulders sagged, and he turned away from the door. Bad had nearly finished blocking the wall and ceiling.

“There,” Bad said as he placed the last block. “Now all we need is the extra beds.”

“I can help with that,” said Niki. She pulled a purple bed and placed it in one of the new corners. A yellow bed settled next to it, and the pink bed squeezed between the two furnished beds. “There. Enough for everyone.”

She plopped down on the pink bed and splayed on it. Peace squealed and leapt out of Dream’s arms to bounce next to her. She wrapped her arms around the tiny piglin and threw him in the air once before tucking him into her side.

“Bedtime!” Niki said.

“You heard her,” Bad said as he took the black bed next to the pink. “Time for some well-deserved, much needed sleep.”

Dream moved towards the white bed on Niki’s other side. A tug on his wrist pulled him away from the enticing furniture.

“I think we’d feel better if you slept on the purple one,” Ranboo said. Biting back another groan, Dream shimmied past Niki’s bed. Peace instantly scrambled up and reached out tiny arms to Dream. He picked Peace back up and finally climbed into the purple bed. The tail *finally* let go. A red mark remained on his wrist, but otherwise his hand still worked.

Ranboo moved to take the yellow bed, but Tommy sat on it and stuck out his tongue. Rolling his eyes, Ranboo climbed into the white one instead.

“Good night!” Bad chirped cheerfully. Various versions of the phrase echoed back. Bad removed the torch lighting the room from the wall, and the whole room went dark. But not silent. The shufflings of bed sheets filled the black, and then soft breathing. No snores, but plenty of proof the room was full of people.

Dream lay quieting his own breath and listened. Listened to Peace’s soft snorts, Bad’s odd scuffling sniffs, Niki’s quiet near whistling, Ranboo and Ender’s almost inaudible whooping, and Tommy’s eerie echoing puffs. And then the muffled snores from across the hall became audible too, and with the growing warmth of the room, Dream felt a deep ache soothe. He adjusted Peace so that the tiny piglin’s head was tucked under Dream’s chin. Green eyes closed lazily over curved lips.

A creak broke the soft atmosphere, and green eyes shot open. He quickly located the sound as coming from the yellow bed where Tommy slept. Careful not to make his own bed creak, Dream glanced over his bed’s headrest. The moonlight from the one window highlighted floating blue eyes.

“Tommy?” Dream whispered. He looked the ghostly figure up and down as he sat up. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Tommy whispered quickly. “I thought you were asleep.”

“I’m a light sleeper,” Dream whispered back. “Do you need something?”

“No,” Tommy whispered with a pout. “Nevermind.”

The ghost sat back on his bed, and the creak sounded less loud. Dream’s head tilted and then shook. He laid back down on his side, making sure not to wake Peace as he tucked the child back under his chin.

A softer creak screeched through the room. This time from the white bed perpendicular to Dream’s feet. A lanky but light weight plopped onto Dream’s side. A familiar tail rewrapped around Dream’s sore wrist. Dream chuffed a soft laugh but let the weight get comfortable in its pinning position. The enderman hybrid took care not to press any weight on Peace, so Dream had no complaints when a soft cheek nuzzled his. The enderman hybrid curled slightly and place his head the space between Dream’s back and the wall.

“Hey!” called Tommy a little too loudly from his bed. “He can’t do that!”

“{ΞΠΦ ΔΛΠ {LWW, σΨΠLΨΛ,” Ender warbled sleepily.

“Sleep, both of you,” Bad grumbled grumpily from the other side of the room. “Or I’ll kick you both out.”

Tommy muttered something Dream didn’t quiet catch, but sheet shuffling followed. And then the soft atmosphere returned. Sleep nearly claimed him when then creak sounded again. He didn’t even lift his head as a hand found his. Letting go of the back of Peace’s head, he let the other hand claim his own. His lips remained curved upwards for the rest of the night.

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A large, wooden house sat in the middle of a large lake surrounded by various repaired builds. He couldn't see the house clearly from here, but he was sure the wood making up the structure would be patchwork, some blocks old, some new. But it still stood. No one had felt the need to blow it to splinters.

"I think we can skirt around," Niki said as she stood next to him.

"I can teleport home," Dream said. "You can meet me there."

"Pretty sure no one's going to let you go off on your own at the moment," Techno commented. "So if you teleport, you better teleport all of us."

"Yeah," Ranboo said, and a puffed tail wrapped back around Dream's wrist. Dream stroked the soft fur.

Niki slapped Dream hard on the arm not holding Peace's hand.

"...what was that for?" Dream muttered, unable to rub his arm with Peace gripping the other one hard.

"I owed you one," Niki said. "And that was a dumb suggestion."

Dream grimaced behind his mask, but he didn't argue.

"So, teleport then?" Niki asked. Dream nodded. His hand slipped into the code, and they were gone.

-break-

“Hey. This place isn’t half-bad,” Bad said as they stood before the large wood and stone structure. Even the demon had to bend his head to see the top. “Did you really build this yourself?”

Dream stared at Bad, who grinned widely back.

“What? No offense, Dream, but you’ve never been a builder.”

Huffing, Dream strode forward. He opened the door and a dog lunged at him. With a quick spin, Dream dodged the lunge, and the dog hurried forward to stop at Techno’s feet. Techno bent down and handed it the rotten flesh of a zombie that had strayed too close to the last village they had visited.

“Techno got a few dogs while you were gone,” Niki explained, shaking her head. “They wandered in after the barrier fell, and Techno said something about finally rebuilding his dog army.”

“It’s not a bad idea,” Dream admitted. Peace pulled him forward into the house. He then dragged him up the stairs. Various steps followed. The tiny piglin pushed the door to their shared room open, and Dream yanked the child accidentally back as he froze.

No remnants of the shattered code he had tested remained. The room was neat and bright with lanterns hanging from the ceiling and multiple windows. Green carpet now lined all of the room with various vases filled with flowers on bookshelves all around the room. The bed itself was larger and the same green as the carpet, and two large, trapped chest sat at the foot of the bed. The walls had been peeled into a nice smooth look and held various drawings that had undoubtedly come from tiny hard-fingered hands.

“Papa’s room better now!” Peace cried as the little piglin spun and spread his arms out wide. Dream stared at the little piglin who grinned and showed all his growing teeth. A beat of silence passed, and the grin shrunk. “Papa not like?”

“...I don’t know,” Dream said. He scooped the little piglin up and then faced the various expectant faces in the doorway. “Why?”

“My idea, actually,” Niki said, stepping forward but not entering the room. “Peace took to hiding in here when we...weren’t sure if you were coming back. So I added the lanterns so it wouldn’t be so dark in here.”

“Ender and I thought it might be better for Peace if the floor wasn’t so hard,” Ranboo softly added, “so we added the green carpet.”

“And then the idiot started passing out from exhaustion after playing with your kid in here,” Techno said, “so I upgraded the bed so he didn’t break his back curling up in it.”

“And I was finally able to entice Peace outside by finding flowers to brighten up the room,” Niki said still in the doorway. “No offense, but it was a little gloomy. Especially for a kid.”

“Had to add the extra window so the flowers wouldn’t die,” Techno huffed from behind Niki. “Even with the lanterns, the light in here was terrible.”

“Ender started drawing pictures with Peace to ‘decorate’ for when you came back,” Ranboo continued half-hidden behind both Niki and Techno. “So those went on the wall.”

“We added the bookshelves to place the vases on, and because,” Niki said. “Well, because you seem to like the library a lot.”

“And since you seem to like your privacy, the door has a lock now,” Techno said gesturing to the door knob that did have a lock on it. “No barrier blocks needed. Just lock the door, and we won’t come in.”

“If you’re not okay with any of the changes, we can put it all back how it was,” Niki quickly offered. “We tried not to go through much of your stuff. Techno found a way to meld your chests together without opening them and even managed to trap them. You can see they’ve never been opened, at least not since they were trapped. But we didn’t rummage through them. This was all...well, we wanted it to feel a bit more like home. For Peace.”

Dream swung his gaze around and took in all the room again. A bright mix of flower scent drifted through the room, and the sunlight streaming through the windows glinted on the metal lanterns. His feet sunk minutely into the plush carpet as he shifted. He walked over and sat on the bed. It bounced slightly.

Peace squealed and jumped out of Dream's hands. He fell into a flip and tumble. The tiny piglin finally stopped and flopped on his stomach. He sat up and then flipped onto his back, tiny arms splayed above his head and legs kicking out happily.

Dream pulled his mask to the side, a small smile stretched visibly under glittering green eyes. With a quick movement, he grabbed the little piglin and threw him up in that air. Peace squealed in both confusion and fright. Dream caught him and bopped his forehead against a confused piglin's head. "If Peace likes it, it's okay."

The three seemed to sag at the words, and Dream let out an inaudible chuckle. He could learn to like the room like this.

## Chapter End Notes

$\{ \sqsubseteq_{\Psi} \sqsubseteq_{\Omega} \sqcup_{\Gamma} \sqsubseteq_{\Delta} \sqsupset_{\Psi} \} \overline{\Phi}_{\Omega} \neq \Psi_{\Gamma} \not\vdash_{\Omega} \Gamma$  – She would have stopped you

≡∩∅ ∩∅' } ⚪⊙⊙∅ ∅⊙ ⚪∧⊙Δ { ⊑∅ ∨ ∨⊙⊙⊙ ∨ ∨∅∅∅∅ ∅⊙ ⚪∅∅ ∩∧⊙⊙∅∅∅ - But it's good to know she never needed to get involved.

$$\mathcal{S} \ni \overline{\Phi} \in \Psi \ni \omega \in \Omega \ni \eta, \{ \in \Psi \Delta \cap \Lambda' \overline{\Phi} \cup \Psi \overline{\Phi} \neq \emptyset \cap \Psi \Delta \Delta \omega. \Lambda \cap \overline{\Phi} \Delta \cap \overline{\Phi} \in \Omega \cap \overline{\Phi} \Delta$$
[illegible]

For the record, she won't let you leave. Not without a fight. And you wouldn't want to hurt her more, would you?

[illegible][illegible]





# I Trust You. I do. (But It's Hard.)

## Chapter Summary

Dream is getting back in the swing of things in his own house. But things aren't the same. And maybe they shouldn't be.

## Chapter Notes

I profusely apologize for taking so long to add this chapter. IRL stuff plus major writing block made this chapter take a bit longer. The story is officially in its second half now, which means the direction and tone are shifting to suit. Hopefully you will continue to enjoy the story.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bad grinned his wide, white smile.

“Want some muffins? This kitchen is fantastic!”

“That’s because it’s mine,” Niki said sliding in behind the counter next to Bad. She peeked inside her odd furnace. A wide smile widened under her sparkling eyes. “Those look great!”

“Thank you. I’ve spent a lot of time perfecting the recipe,” Bad said cheerfully. His smile briefly faltered. “Sorry for using your ingredients without permission. I thought they were Dream’s, and I wanted to prepare a little surprise for you all for letting me stay here.”

“That’s fine. At least you’re not wasting my ingredients like Ranboo does.”

“Hey! I’m still learning,” Ranboo pouted. He stayed in the doorway with Dream as he pouted. “And it was Ender who decided a food fight might cheer Peace up.”

In Dream's arms, Peace snorted. "'Boo play food too.'

"It still wasn't my idea," Ranboo stubbornly insisted. Another snort sounded behind them.

"Didn't see you stopping the mess," Techno said blandly.

"It wasn't Ender who nearly threw the egg at my face," Niki said with an irritated frown. "We'd only just gotten the chickens too."

"...I said I was sorry," Ranboo muttered. A tufted tail wrapped around Dream's wrist, and Dream's eyes rolled. "Dream, tell them to stop picking on me."

"Hey, if you made the mess, you have to own up to it," said Tommy as he phased through the ceiling. He puffed out his chest. "Show that you're the biggest f— man around, so it doesn't matter what you do."

"Language!" Bad scolded. "And while owning up to your messes is all well and good, let's learn from them instead of taking pride in them, okay? I'm sure Ranboo won't mess around with Niki's ingredients like that again."

"Unless he wants to lose bread privileges for another week," Niki chimed in.

"He was especially annoying on the road," Techno added. "He was hoping one of us'd take pity and share our small ration with him. He's lucky we got to the Greater SMP before the week was out so Niki could make more."

"Turns out my bakery was still in the remnants of L'Manberg nearby," Niki clarified. "I got to make enough for the whole trip to...whatever you call that ravine you settled in."

“I don’t think we ever named it,” Bad said as he took out the muffins and set them on the counter to cool.

“I named it. It was Less-Pog Pogtopia,” Tommy said from his position floating over their heads. He reached down to snatch a muffin. Bad tried to swat the teen’s hand away, but Bad’s own hand passed through Tommy’s. The muffin was stuffed in Tommy’s mouth momentarily before being spit out. Tommy quickly fanned his tongue. “Thad’s hod.”

“I could have warned you, but you didn’t give me a chance,” Bad said after a strange glance at his hand. “Where’s Ghostbur?”

“He’d wandered off somewhere,” Tommy said, his tongue still out of his mouth. He stuck the muffin back into his mouth and grimaced.

“He’ll be back when he feels like it,” Techno said. Dream looked over his shoulder quick enough to catch the piglin hybrid shrug. “Probably bring that sheep he likes so much with him.”

“Okay, so they’ll be extra muffins then,” Bad said. He clapped his hands together eagerly. “They should have cooled off, so you can come get one if you want.”

“Don’t mind if I do,” Niki said grabbing a larger one.

“Sure that’s a good idea?” Techno warned. Dream grew rigid. “This is the guy who helped brainwash half the server. What if he put something in those?”

Dream glared at Techno, and the piglin hybrid stared blankly back.

“Pretty sure baker’s code applies here,” Niki said as she took a bite. Her eyes sparkled brightly, and Dream relaxed. “These are fantastic, and I demand to know the recipe. Once I get the bakery up and running again, I’m going to sell these by the boatload.”

“The bakery...?” Dream asked, tense again.

“Don’t worry. It’s not for a while yet,” Niki said quickly, the muffin in her hand lowering. “And it’ll definitely have to be after a portal between here and the Greater SMP is built. They’re still rebuilding, so there’s no rush. Gives me enough time to build my own house nearby.”

“Oh,” Dream said quietly. Everyone’s gaze seemed to turn on him at once, and he shuffled. “You can...stay here for—for as long as you need.”

Niki threw a glance over Dream’s shoulder and then nodded with a small smile.

“I have grown used to living here if I’m honest,” said Niki. “If you don’t mind me staying here, I’d be happy to stay. It’s large enough. Might make a small house for storage though. There’s a whole server of materials to be gathered now, and my bakery is going to need a lot.”

“The muffins are getting cold,” Bad said quickly. “Come get yours.”

Dream moved to the counter and grabbed a muffin. The sweet spices filled his tongue, and despite the growing knot in his stomach, he attempted to smile at Bad. The exasperated smile he got back gave him the sense his smile wasn’t quite right, but he simply took another delicious bite.

“Hey! That’s your third! Technoblade hasn’t even gotten one!” Bad said swatting ineffectively at Tommy.

“They’e goob,” Tommy said through a full mouth.

“He can have mine,” Techno said, and Dream noticed his sword extended lazily from one hand. He stayed in the hallway. “It would spoil my appetite for whatever Niki cooks up later.”

“Oh, I’ll make something light so you don’t need to worry about that,” Niki said. She grabbed another muffin. “Or at least I don’t.”

“More for us then,” Ranboo said before taking another bite out of his second muffin. Having finished his own, Dream reached for the second-to-last muffin. Everyone was watching Techno, and the piglin hybrid simply snorted and lay his sword on his shoulder.

“I’ll go check on the potatoes,” he said before walking towards the house entrance. Dream made a face.

“We have potatoes now?”

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The farm stretched down the slope of the mountain. Dream blinked at the large separated fields and their various crops.

“Once we got our hands on some different seeds and the barrier fell, we expanded the fields and separated them by crop,” Niki explained, coming up to stand next to Dream. “We have a lot more than wheat and carrots now.”

Peace squealed and wiggled in Dream’s arms. Crouching down, Dream set him on the ground. The small piglin grabbed Dream’s sleeve and yanked him forward towards one of the fields.

“Do you want to show your Papa the beetroots?” Niki asked. Peace nodded.

“Beets!” he cried happily.

“Turns out he really likes beetroot soup,” Niki told Dream. Dream nodded and let the piglin child tug him towards the beetroot field. He watched out of the corner of his eye as another piglin figure worked on a field the farthest away.

“Since you don’t like potatoes, we put that one as far away as we could,” Niki near whispered in his ear. “Techno’s the one who expanded the fields, so it felt right to let him take one for his potatoes.”

Dream looked back down at Peace and gave another nod. His throat felt oddly tight. Peace let go of Dream’s sleeve and gestured to the field with animated arm flaps. Smiling, Dream crouched and harvested a beetroot which he handed to Peace. Peace eagerly took it and stored it. Dream blinked.

“He knows how to use his inventory?”

“Seemed like something important to teach him after he kept tripping over all the flowers he kept trying to bring into the house,” Niki said. “Techno had to help him because apparently piglin inventories work differently from players.”

Still crouching, Dream nodded again. He kept his eyes on Peace harvesting beetroot after beetroot.

“...I should have stayed.”

“You should have,” Niki agreed. “But you came back. That’s good enough for us.”

“Is it?” Dream whispered, not looking over at the potato fields.

“It is,” Niki said, exasperation in her voice. “Talk to him. Before you force us to lock you two in a room together.”

Dream stayed silent.

“Want to see the flowers?” Niki asked.

“Flowers!” Peace exclaimed running over. He waved his hands eagerly into Dream’s uncovered face. “Flowers!”

“Flowers,” Dream agreed. He held out his hand. “To the flowers?”

“To flowers!” Peace echoed, grabbing Dream’s hand. The tiny piglin squealed and then jumped high enough to smack his forehead against Dream’s. Giggling in squeals, Peace hurriedly pulled Dream out of his crouch into a much more colorful field. Dream followed.

The tufted tail squeezed tight enough to cut the blood flow to Dream's hand.

“Are you sure this will work?” Ranboo asked. He blinked, and Ender continued, “ $\exists \neg \forall \neg \neg \neg$   
 $\neg \neg \exists \neg \neg, \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg \neg$ .”

“It will,” Dream said confidently. He gave the enderman hybrid a grin. “If you doubt me, we can go back down the safer way.”

“𐌲𐌹𐌿𐌸'𐌲𐌺𐌹,” Ender hissed. The green and red eyes closed, and then nervous red and green eyes opened again. “I know you said you’d done this in one of your manhunts, but if something happens, Niki might get mad at us again.”

“She can check with Bad,” said Dream. “This was old hat before the hunters went up to 5.”

Ranboo stared straight at Dream's face and then groaned. "Are you sure you don't have those recordings somewhere?"

"Looks like the Egg corrupted all of them," Dream said a bit too cheerfully. Ranboo's face fell further. "Maybe we can do a couple of new ones with you, Bad, and T—Niki as the hunters. Pretty sure I can entice her with some rare ingredients or something. And you of course."

"Really?" Ranboo said, his body perking up to its full height.

"What are you guys doing up here?" asked Tommy as he floated up next to them on the barn tower roof.

"Showing Ranboo one of my old manhunt tricks," Dream said moving towards the edge.

"Really? Which one? Wait! Let me guess. Given the fact you're all the way up here, it has to be one of the MLGs. Is it the boat clutch? Or hay bales? Landing on a horse? Hold on. Are you going to show him how to fly a boat?!"

Both Dream and Ranboo stared at the excited teen. Tommy scowled and crossed his arms.

"What?"

"You've seen my manhunts?" Dream asked.

"I did. So what? I watched them for tactical reasons. Know your enemy and s—. It's basic strategy."

Ranboo groaned again. "Why did he get to see them and not me?"



“Because I was paying attention, Ranboob,” Tommy snarked. “How’d you miss some of the most entertaining content around anyway?”

“I probably had not even spawned yet,” Ranboo said gloomily. “I only remember coming onto the server after L’Manberg blew up the first time. I think before that only Ender existed.”

“How’s that work?” Tommy asked. “Did the server just take a random Enderman and insert some player code, and hey presto, you exist?”

“Something like that,” Ranboo muttered, slumping into himself. The tail around Dream’s wrist slipped off to curl around white and black feet. “I was added to Ender to make it easier for him to interact with the other players and help Dream. The server guardian—she didn’t expect me to have a consciousness of my own.”

“Nothing can be made out of nothing,” Dream interrupted. He took a step away from the edge and towards the drooping enderman hybrid. Red and green eyes stayed focused on the floor. He lifted a hand and hesitated. Taking a deep breath, he placed it on the enderman hybrid’s shoulder. The red and green gaze jerked onto him. “You are a soul that could have found a home in any body, but you settled into Ender’s. Your soul was strong enough to share. Strong enough to struggle with only knowing half of yourself and to seek the full truth of who you are. And you...you live with who you are as honestly as you can. Don’t start lying to yourself. You exist because you are needed. In some ways more than Ender.  $\triangle \wedge \boxplus$   $\text{H}\circ\cap \text{E}\circ\overline{\Phi}\Xi \triangle \times \omega \text{H}\text{H} \circ \text{I}\wedge$ .”

Smiling at wet red and green eyes, Dream reached up and pressed his cheek against the tall enderman hybrid’s.

“ $\text{H}\circ\cap \times \omega \text{H}\text{I}\wedge \triangle \wedge \boxplus \neq \triangle \Omega \psi \}$ ,  $\times \omega \text{H}\omega \text{H} \text{E}\omega \times$ ?” Dream whirred quietly. Long arms encircled Dream, and the Admin’s feet dangled off the ground.

“I remember,” Ranboo said full and echoey next to Dream’s ear. He rubbed his wet cheek against Dream’s hard enough to cause friction. “I won’t forget.”

“Good,” Dream said in a raspy breath. Ranboo stopped and sheepishly placed Dream back on the roof.

“This is way too much sap for me,” Tommy said with a deep a scowl. His hands crossed over his chest, and his blue eyes bore holes into Ranboo. “Can we get back to the manhunt trick now?”

“Sounds good,” Ranboo said. “Let’s learn how to fly a boat.”

“Seriously?!” Tommy said eagerly, his hands dropping to his sides. He nearly bounced on thin air. “Finally! I’ve wanted to know how to do that for forever!”

“No offense, but why would you need to know?” Ranboo said. His black hand spread open to point to the space between Tommy’s floating feet and the ground far below. Tommy’s scowl returned.

“Because it’s one of the coolest things ever,” Tommy snapped. “And that’s f— insensitive!”

“Says the pot,” Ranboo shot back.

“Who are you calling a pot?!” Tommy yelled.

Ranboo—no Ender hissed at Tommy. Tommy lunged at the enderman hybrid and slipped right through him. Crackling warbles sounded out of a sharp unhinged mouth.

“Stop,” Dream said, uncomfortable memories of times past overlapping the two teen’s one-sided scuffle. “Do you want to know how to fly a boat or not?”

Green and red eyes blinked, and Ranboo instantly straightened and focused on Dream. Tommy took another swipe at Ranboo, but the fist passed through Ranboo. Grumbling, Tommy crossed his arms again and pouted in Dream's direction. Good enough.

"It's not hard once you get the basic movement," Dream started. He took out a boat from his inventory and jumped into it off the roof. He got out in it and out of it in rapid succession. Finally the bottom of the boat petered onto solid ground. Looking up, Dream stumbled backwards as blue eyes stared way too closely into his. The blue eyes near sparkled.

"That was awesome!" Tommy yelled. "I knew the manhunts weren't staged! Take that, Wilbur!"

"They weren't?" Dream said stepping out of the boat. Purple particles whirled in front of Tommy, and Ender warbled.

" $\square \circ \triangle$   $\text{m} \text{m}$   $\text{h} \circ \text{m}$   $\text{m} \circ$   $\overline{\text{p}} \square \triangle \overline{\text{p}}$ ?  $\text{h} \circ \text{m}$   $\text{m} \text{m} \text{h}$   $\overline{\text{p}}$   $\text{w} \oplus \triangle \text{m} \overline{\text{p}}$   $\text{u} \text{h}$   $\text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \square$   $\text{w} \oplus \text{u}$   $\triangle \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$   
 $\text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$   $\text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$   $\square \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$   $\text{w} \oplus \text{u}$   $\triangle \text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$ ."

"Right," Dream said with a cough and crooked smile. "The trick is to get in and out of the boat really fast."

"What!?" Tommy cried, sticking his head through Ender's chest. Ender hissed and swatted at the blond's head, but Tommy simply stuck his tongue out briefly at the enderman hybrid. "That's it?"

"I told you it wasn't hard," Dream said.

" $\text{m} \text{m}$   $\text{m} \overline{\text{p}}$   $\square \triangle \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$   $\overline{\text{p}} \circ \text{m} \circ$   $\overline{\text{p}} \square \triangle \text{m}$   $\text{m} \overline{\text{p}}$   $\text{m} \text{m} \text{m} \text{m}$ ?"

"It can be," Dream said storing the boat. "You have to keep a certain rhythm, but as long as you keep at it, there's a bit of wiggle room. I'll show you."

“Show him what?”

Dream spun around to see Niki walking towards them, Bad not too far behind her.

“Nothing?” Dream said, his voice getting higher.

“Uh huh,” Niki said with narrowed eyes. “So it wasn’t you three I saw on the roof?”

“What’s it to you, woman?” Tommy demanded. Ender grinned.

“No offense to you, brat, but the those two are fully alive. And I’d like to keep it that way,” Niki replied. Blue eyes blinked and briefly shone before Tommy’s scowl deepened.

“Full f— offense taken,” Tommy growled.

“Now, now,” Bad said rushing to Niki’s side and holding out his hands placatingly. One held a stack of wheat. “She didn’t mean it like that. She’s just worried. You’re just as alive as anyone else here.”

“Don’t patronize me,” Tommy turned his acid tone on the demon. “I know I’m dead, all right? I know I’m lucky to even be here and not in f— pieces of broken code! That I remember who I am. So what if I can’t touch almost anyone? Or if I get tired every time I move stuff? What am I f— doing here?! I can’t even try Dream’s s— boat trick!” The last two words broke between a wet gasp. A raspy breath shook that transparent teen’s form. Wet, blue eyes trembled wide. “I—I’m dead.”

“Tommy—” Bad tried.

“SHUT UP!” Tommy yelled, his fists flying in Bad’s direction and going through the demon. The teen floated fully through Bad. The teen stared at his transparent hands. Equally transparent tears slipped down see-through cheeks. The blond bit his lip, and the transparent hands clenched back into fists. Flowing, clouded blue eyes pointed straight at Dream.

“You’re the reason I’m like this! If—if you hadn’t thrown me to the—to *it*. If you had let me in with everyone else—why me? You let Ranboo and Niki in. You let Phil and Techno in *twice*. Why me?! WHY DID YOU LET *IT* TAKE ME?!”

[illegible]

“You’re wasting your f— breath,” Tommy shouted. “I don’t understand you, you f— b—!”

“He said you would have turned us over to the Egg if it benefitted you,” Ranboo said in a blink. He stood straight, keeping himself between Dream and Tommy. “Dream gave you over to the Egg because it benefitted *us*.”

“Like H— I would!” Tommy screamed. His face remained unnaturally pale. “I would never have dealt with that—that thing!”

“Just like you would never have called for assistance from an anarchist to fight against tyranny and then turn around and reinstated a government right before his eyes,” said a monotone voice behind Tommy. Everyone shifted to look beyond Tommy to Techno. “Or cause enough trouble and force your best friend to exile you for the good of the same country you fought, bled, and died for.” The piglin hybrid snorted and shook his head. “When Dream laid out the reasons why he traded you to the Egg for our safety, the only thing I could fault him on was letting the Egg amass more power over the server and drugging us.”

Tommy's mouth opened and then snapped shut. He floated several inches in the air and then shot past Techno, barely grazing the warrior. Dream watched the teen disappear with knot of words clogging his esophagus.

"LANGUAGE!"

The cry startled those left in the clearing beside the house.

"Sorry," Bad said as he shifted from left to right. "Had to get that out of my system."

"It's a good thing you held it in," Niki said with a faint smile. "That..." The smile vanished. "That wasn't a good time for it."

"I figured," Bad agreed. "That's why I held it in." Bad looked down the direction where Tommy had disappeared. "Should one of us go after him?"

"Maybe later," Niki said softly.

"...Sorry," Dream whispered. Three surprised looks and one flat expression turned towards him.

"Why?" Bad asked. "I mean...I guess it's a little your fault that Tommy's a ghost now. Actually now that I think about it, it's a lot your fault Tommy's a ghost now." Niki jabbed him hard in the ribs. "Ow. I wasn't done. See, without Dream, Tommy wouldn't even be a ghost right now. He'd be a bunch of broken code. So credit where credit is due."

"That's true," said Ranboo from closer than Dream had realized. The enderman hybrid bent down to place his head on Dream's shoulder, and his tufted tail took its regular spot on Dream's wrist. "You saved him."

“I also condemned him to the Egg,” Dream admitted. “I let the Egg overwrite his personal code.”

“You didn’t know it would do that,” Bad said. “I don’t think any of us knew. It hadn’t revealed it could do that until Tommy. I mean it threatened, but even those of us from the Eggpire weren’t sure it could.”

Techno snorted, but Niki glared at him so he didn’t say anything. A tiny pair of arms wrapped around Dream’s leg. Reaching down, Dream patted Peace’s head.

“So what were you doing here before we all rudely interrupted,” Bad encouraged, moving closer to Ranboo and Dream. Techno took some large steps to place himself alongside the demon, but Bad paid him no mind. “There was boat trick mentioned?”

“Dream promised to teach me how to fly a boat,” Ranboo said, still slouched onto Dream.

“Oh, that boat trick,” Bad said in exasperation. “It’s super easy once you get the rhythm, but boy is annoying to have used against you. He used that trick for the first time outside of a manhunt. We were all furious at him for days. It wasn’t even necessary for him to win!”

“I thought you said he did it outside of manhunt,” Niki pointed out from where she had squeezed herself between Bad and Techno.

“Yeah, but we used to play all sorts of challenges,” Bad said excitedly. “That one was one Dream named Hitmen. It wasn’t anything fancy, just us chasing him for like an hour. We were supposed to despawn him before time ran out, but this muffin kept towering up. Right before time was up, he decided to fly his stupid boat down just to spite us. Worst part was that after we finished, we learned that if we had managed to hit the dumb thing he would have fallen and despawned instantly.”

“Too bad you didn’t,” Dream said, his throat easing at the rusty but familiar teasing.

“How were we supposed to know you could fly a boat?! Let alone that hitting it would have cause you to fall?!”

“Are there recordings of the challenges somewhere?” Ranboo asked, head popping up from Dream’s shoulder.

“Maybe. Yeah,” Bad replied. “But if anyone knows where they are it would be Sapnap or George. George is more likely to have kept his, since he did the most challenges with Dream way back when.”

“We can check with them when we next go to the Greater SMP,” Niki said, her own voice hopeful. She focused fully on Dream. “So how do you fly a boat?”

“...it involves riding off the roof,” Dream said carefully.

“Does it also involving someone on the ground with a bucket of water in case of failure?” Niki asked a bit too brightly.

“...Bad, would you watch us from here with a water bucket in case something goes wrong?”

“Sure thing, Dream,” said Bad. He pulled out a full water bucket from his inventory and stored his stack of wheat.

“I’ll stay with him,” Techno said. Bad flicked his gaze to Techno before meeting Dream’s and shrugging.

“Fine with me.”

“Not fine with me,” Dream said, tone hard.



“I’ll stay with them,” Niki said with a sigh. She flapped her hand in the direction of the barn. “Get going.”

“Thanks, Niki,” Ranboo said. He darted forward, rubbed his cheek against hers, and dashed to climb back onto the barn’s roof.

“Are you sure?” Dream asked pausing from running after the enderman hybrid.

“Come here,” Niki said stepping towards him. Dream took two steps forward and stood in front of the pinkette. Fondness quirking the edges of her lips, she leaned up. She pointedly tilted her head towards Dream. Hand reaching up for the mask on the side of his head, Dream hesitated. He let his hand drop and gently bumped his forehead against Niki’s. She bopped back and then leaned back. “Have fun. Don’t die.”

“We won’t,” Dream whispered, backing up and grabbing at the edges of his cloak. “I’ll show you later.”

Brown eyes widened and then sparkled.

“You better.”

Dream gave a wavering nod. Bad waved the full bucket from behind Niki, and Dream peeked at Techno. The piglin hybrid's attention remained on Bad. Dream's lips pressed together.

[illegible]

Techno would listen to Niki. And Dream could jump down at any time. Giving a last glance at Techno, Dream slipped an enderpearl blatantly from his inventory and threw it onto the roof. He landed next to Ender, and his chest and stomach burned. He exchanged the enderpearls with his boat and set it on the edge.

“Time to fly?” Ranboo said, red and green eyes wide. A boat sat collapsed in his hand.

Dream smiled.

“Sure. Time to fly.”

---

Cold sharpness edged out fuzzy warmth. Eyelids pried open, and the dark room blurred and focused. Red and white replaced the room, and cold hands shoved Dream’s shoulder nearly knocking Dream off his side and onto his back.

“Come on,” muttered a voice. “Budge over.”

“Tommy?” Dream murmured through a yawn. Blackness battled with white as he opened and closed his eyes. The shoving paused though the cold hands stayed.

“Go back to sleep,” the voice hissed.

“Not how it works,” Dream mumbled. He managed to lift up his head. “You came back?”

“Where else was I going to go?”

“Tubbo?” Dream suggested, the edges of the conversation still fuzzy. “Puffy? Sam?”

“Who’d go to Sam after what he did?” The cold hands shoved. Dream released one arm from Peace and grabbed a demanding hand.

“Weren’t you mad at me?” Dream asked, his thoughts scrambling to make sense of the situation.

“You gave me to the—to *it*. Of course I’m f— p—.”

“Then why are you here?” came his finally clear voice.

“Because I have nowhere else to go!” the voice fumed. “F— happy?”

“Language,” Dream grumbled. He pulled the hand and dragged its owner onto the edge of the bed. “Leave Bad alone.”

“He’s not even f— here!”

“Sleep. Make sense in the morning,” Dream suggested. The boy seemed to settled behind Peace.

“What sense? You threw me to—to *it*. But I—I’m back here.”

“Tubbo?” Dream muttered. Blond strands blinked in and out.

“I tried,” the voice spoke softly. Dream struggled to keep his eyes opened and focused on the shadowed face. “Apparently he thought I was some f— ghost come to haunt him. He got the ghost part right.”

“Puffy?”

“She doesn’t know me from Adam. Plus there’s the whole ‘she tried to leave the server’ thing.”

“Sam?”

“I already told you,” the voice said crossly. “He left me to die.”

“Mm,” Dream hummed. Cold skin pressed against his warm forehead. Dream pressed back. The voice whispered something, but the words muddled and swirled. Darkness steadied, and Dream’s thoughts faded back into unconsciousness.

---

An irritating noise beeped in Dream’s ear, and green eyes fluttered open. He moved to roll onto his back and near fell off. Why was he so close to the edge of the bed?

Checking on Peace, Dream wrapped the still sleeping child piglin deeper in the blankets and sat up. The annoying beeping continued from the bookshelf next to the bed, and Dream reached for his communicator. Several messages pinged in rapid succession.

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Dream, sorry to wake you, but I can’t get out of my room.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: There are barrier blocks blocking my door.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Niki’s waiting for me to show her how to make my special breakfast muffins.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I guess that ruined the surprise.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I really need out of here.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: The windows are blocked too.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Dream, they're beneath the floor.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I'm starting to feel claustrophobic.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I'd really appreciate you hurrying over here and getting me out.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Please, Dream. I'm starting to panic.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Please.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I'm begging you.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Let me out!*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Dream, the ceiling has barrier blocks.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I can't get out.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: This is getting really worrying, Dream.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: We can talk this out.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: You know you can trust me.*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: Okay, maybe you don't but*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I can't blame if this was all some ruse to lock me up*

*Badboyhalo whispers to you: I definitely deserve—*

Clipping the communicator to his sweatpants, Dream dashed out of the room. He cleared the barrier blocks and yanked open Bad's door.

The demon sat curled up on the floor, tail tightly wound around him. Fingers flew over the communicator's keypad, the movements jerky but precise. At the thumping of the door, Bad looked up and sagged into his knees. The communicator dangled from one hand.

"Good. I see you got my messages," Bad tried to say brightly. The communicator trembled slightly. "I kinda got a little bit panicky at the end there. Started spouting nonsense. Sorry about that."

Dream shook his head. The words tangled back in his throat, Dream sat beside Bad and leaned into his side. The Admin unclipped his communicator and typed.

*You whisper to Badboyhalo: I should apologize.*

Bad stared down at Dream when his communicator pinged and then read the message. The long tail unwound enough to loop around Dream.

"Why would you need to apologize?" Bad wondered. Dream pried open his lips.

"...I placed the blocks."

Bad stilled, the soft motion of his breathing hesitating for a moment.

“You...placed them?” Bad asked slowly, and Dream’s neck and face burned. The demon drooped. “I guess I understand—”

“Not because of you,” Dream interrupted hurriedly. “To protect you.”

“Protect me? From who?”

“...Techno,” Dream admitted. Bad sighed.

“If he attacked me, he would have every reason to-“

“You’re my friend, Bad,” Dream said. He gingerly tilted his head onto Bad’s shoulder. When the demon didn’t jerk away, Dream let it rest fully. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“I hurt a lot of people, Dream.”

“So did I,” Dream whispered. “Do you want to see me hurt?”

“Never,” the demon’s voice echoed and crackled. Dream’s lips curved into a fond smile. Sappnap would call that Bad’s serious voice. The smile tugged downwards. A weight lay on Dream’s head. “But Techno’s still hurting, and he’s your friend too.”

The frown deepened.

“He doesn’t have to hurt you to feel better,” Dream stubbornly said.

“Maybe,” Bad mollified. A dark arm squeezed around Dream’s shoulders. “Have you done anything to help him?”

Dream didn’t answer. Bad chuckled half-heartedly.

“It’s hard to help a friend that’s hurting, but I find talking helps. From someone who you don’t hate and want dead anyway.”

“I don’t think he wants you dead,” Dream said.

“Pretty sure he does. I’m the reason he’s lost his best friend. Or his father figure. Kinda not sure what they were exactly.”

“It wasn’t you. It was the Egg.”

“Dream,” Bad spoke slowly. “We’ve been over this. The Egg was my—”

“I tried to condition and manipulate Tommy,” Dream whispered rapidly. “Wanted him to pay for the destruction on the server. For making me drive everyone I loved away. I made him suicidal.”

White eyes fell fully on him, and words kept spilling out.

“I tricked Tubbo into believing I was his friend. I gave Ranboo these...terrible, terrible lessons. I convinced him to blow up the community house. I made Sam build the absolute worse place on the server. I refused to let him lighten the conditions. I held a sword to Tubbo’s throat and nearly slit it in front of Tommy. I deserved to be treated like a monster.”



“Like a monster?” Bad gaspingly prompted. Dream leaned further into Bad. The warmth was soothing. It was. It wasn’t directed at him.

“They threw me in the very prison I forced Sam to make,” Dream whispered. The last words came out by rote. “In a small obsidian cell with a lava wall for bars. I was fed the potatoes that I chose for the prisoner. I was ungrateful and threw the books that were given me and my clock over and over in the lava, so Sam took those away. And then Tommy visited, and like the monster I am, I killed him in cold blood. So Sam had to let Quackity come and get—” A gargle cut off the words. The rest struggled to clamber out.

“What did Quackity do? What did Sam let him do?” Bad gaped. The temperature around the demon grew heavier and hotter. Dream swallowed. Quackity was gone. Should he? What would he gain by saying it out loud? The arm around Dream’s shoulders tightened. “Dream, what did they do? What did Quackity *get*?”

Dream tore out of Bad’s grasp. It was too tight. He was asking—he was asking—He wanted to know—Dream couldn’t...he couldn’t. If he did, then—

Hands pressed on either side of Dream’s face, and Dream flinched. But he couldn’t escape the grasp. He knew what would happen. His mask was all he had left (where was it?). Heated, rough pressure pushed onto his forehead, and the rough, cooling fingers on the side of his face slid back and forth over his cheeks.

“Breath, okay,” came a warm, high voice. A long, thin limb tentatively slipped around his side to hold his back. Pushed him forward and closer to the soft voice. It patted him rhythmically. “In. Out. Yes. Just like that. In. Out.”

Dream found his breaths copied the gentle pats, the spoken rhythm, and the obvious, spicy gusts blown into his face. Memories of falling out of a tree and the same voice with the same process settled him. The pressure on his forehead ceased, and Dream opened his eyes to meet wide white.

“Better?” Bad asked. Dream tilted forward knocking his forehead against Bad’s.

“Thank you,” Dream whispered before backing away. Bad gave a wry chuckle and adjusted to sit next to Dream. The dark arm pulled Dream back against Bad’s side as the patting continued from Bad’s tail.

“You don’t have to talk about it,” Bad whispered. “Not if you don’t want to.”

Dream pushed himself deeper into Bad’s side. Bad wouldn’t—he would never. But Dream couldn’t. So instead he stayed by his friend’s side and soaked in the odd coolness of a friendly demon’s presence.

---

“Stay here.” Bad pushed Dream into the library. His tail curled around Dream’s torso once, and he smiled before closing the door. Blood red eyes met his from where Techno sat at the table. “We’ll call you when the muffins are done.”

“They push you in here too?”

“Yeah,” Dream said softly. He remained by the door.

“If I had to guess I think they want us to talk. I guess we should be glad that they decided on the library instead of a closet.”

“Pretty sure Ender is right outside too,” Dream muttered.

“Just in case I snap and kill you,” Techno said flatly. Dream’s lips twitched. For a moment, nothing else was said. Dream stayed by the door, and Techno stared. Techno sighed, closed the book he was reading, and waved a hand at the empty seat next to him. “Better get this over with.”

Keeping his eyes on Techno, Dream slid into the seat. He glanced at the close book and aborted a chuckle.

“What?” Techno said, catching the half-snort. “Making fun of my reading material now?”

“How many times have you read that?”

“Several,” Techno admitted. “It’s my comfort book.”

“Your comfort book?”

“Yeah. Kinda like you locking yourself up in your room, it makes me feel better. Though my comfort’s a whole lot less worrying.”

Dream lightly glared at the piglin hybrid who smirked back. The smirk slipped off a second later.

“Guess we should talk about the elephant in the room,” Techno said gruffly. He picked up the closed book and stared at it.

“I’m sorry about Phil,” Dream said quickly. He watched as the hands on the book stilled. “I tried to find a way to—”

“You were trying to find a safe way to extract the Egg’s code from Phil’s,” Techno interrupted in a frustrated growl. “You left the broken code formed from your frantic attempts behind. It was scattered all over your room. From a tactical perspective, it would have been dumb to keep trying and giving the undone omelet more opportunities to learn our weakness and use them to destroy or turn us. Phil kinda made that clear with the little he could relay through Ghostbur.”

“...still, I’m sorry—”

“Stop,” Techno snapped. Dream jerked in the chair and nearly rocked it fully to the floor. Dark, hard fingers pressed against Techno’s forehead. The piglin hybrid took a chuffing breath and tried again, “I’m the one who kept pigheadedly pushing the whole ‘Phil’s fine’ thought process without even letting you have a real chance at doubting it. I was so focused on protecting Phil from you, I let him and later through him the Egg get away with things they shouldn’t have. It was dumb on my part and unfair on yours.”

“...you loved him,” Dream said quietly, keeping focused on the piglin’s hands. They gripped the old book tightly.

“I did,” Techno said, the words heavy. Too heavy to hear from the blood warrior. “Still do. He was my friend for...a very long time.”

“Sor—”

“I told you to stop,” Techno near shouted. The book crumpled in the sharp hands, and Dream drew back, his chair backing out from under the table. The hands let the book go and caught the piglin hybrid’s bowed head. “This is going well.”

“...we don’t do well with emotions,” Dream whispered, eyes still glued to sharp hands. Techno snorted.

“Emotions, our shared anathema,” Techno muttered. The head lifted out of the hands, and a snorting sigh breathed between them. “If I hadn’t been a fool, Phil would still be alive.”

Again the chair moved under Dream, and Dream nearly fell on the floor. He quickly shook his head and opened his mouth, but Techno cut him off.

“IWatch.” Techno took out the glasses Dream had given him and an enderchest from his inventory. He placed the glasses on his nose and the enderchest on the table. He opened and pinched his fingers around something as he withdrew it. Broken, jagged twitching code

dangled from Techno's fingers. Dream blinked, and the code's broken edges and weak bond between numbers became easier to see.

Pink and red numbers glowed where they met the white, jagged ones and zeros. Tiny threads of even smaller numbers weaved between the white and slowly aided them into a straighter line. The pink threads shifted into red that propped the broken numbers up and formed missing pieces to match and complete the edges. Dream blinked again, and the tiniest scrap of white paper fell from pinched fingers on to the Art of War. Blood red eyes gazed at the fallen strip with dark shadows over sagging pupils.

"There," Techno said, his soul heavy in the word. Dream stretched out his own hand and touched the paper. It did not fall apart, so he picked it up. When he rubbed it, it folded and bunched into a ball between his fingers. Dream squished it back flat, leaving it wrinkled and unable to regain its former narrow shape.

"...you would make a very good server Admin."

Techno snorted but didn't comment. The hands were back over the book. Dream looked straight into the piglin hybrid's face.

"I need—" Dream started. He pushed past the lump in his throat. "A server does better with multiple Admins."

The piglin hybrid's eyebrows rose.

"You serious?"

"The server can use this kind of coding for certain projects," Dream said as he pinched the paper and reduced the paper down to its basic code. He could barely make out the tiny numbers holding the old ones up. Easing the code back into its regular shape, he curled a fist around it. He let out a small whisper. "I can trust you."

“Hyeh?” the piglin loudly snorted.

“I can trust you,” Dream repeated. “And you can trust Bad.”

“Can I?” the piglin hybrid huffed. Blood red eyes glinted under magnifying glass. “Or are you being as willfully blind as I was?”

Dream jerked and stood. The chair clattered as it crashed wrong-ways onto the floor.

“The Egg is gone,” Dream bit out, placing his hands firmly on the table. “It’s gone and never coming back. I made sure of it.”

“And yet you’ve chosen to pal around with the undone omelet’s number one follower.” Techno’s tone was calm but firm, as if he knew what he was talking about. “He’s the one who you currently trust most. Above Niki who’s fought for you every step of the way. Above Ranboo who likes to act like you hung the moon. Above Ender who would die or kill for you. But no, it’s the former cult leader who you feel safe enough around to let your guard fully down.”

Dream’s lungs flattened, all air missing from them. How did— “How do you know that?”

“The alarm you set on your barrier blocks apparently warns anybody with Admin powers when they’re broken,” Techno said flatly. “Might want to fix that.”

That had been purposeful. An alarm that only the perpetrator and himself could hear. But he had forgotten that in his rush to get to Bad.

“So you spied on us?” Dream growled.

“An unspecified alarm went off near the omelet follower’s room. I went to check he hadn’t done anything egg-y.”

Heat crawled up Dream's neck and face.

"And after you saw everything was fine, you decided to do what?"

"Nothing was fine," Techno said.

"Why? Because I was letting myself be lulled into some—some false sense of security? Because I was letting one of my best friends hug me? Because he was the only one who cared enough to—to ask what the f— happened to me before I got to this timeline!? He was the only one to come after me to make sure I was okay. Not to find some safe place. Not to use my powers to fight some insidious virus. He came to find me because he—*he cared*. About me. Not about the Admin. Not about keeping his allies safe. Not because he had no other f— place to go."

"And us coming to find you doesn't matter because we found you second?" Techno ground out.

"You found me first!" Dream grit out, his volume rising. "You came to my home, demanded my protection, and nearly killed my kid! And that was after I invited every single one of you onto the server! And even when I gave you another chance and let you into my home again, you kept sneaking around my back as if you could do whatever—"

"Which of us gave the other a reason for mistrust first?" Techno cut in. He didn't move, but his eyes glowed red. "Because when we first got here, you poisoned us and threw one of our own out to the undone omelet. Without asking for our opinion. But somehow we were supposed to have trusted you to not do the same thing to Phil?"

"It was my house, my home, my land," Dream said, each word louder than the last. "Why did I have to ask you how to—"

"Sorry to interrupt!" called Ranboo as he stumbled into the room. "We have visitors."

“What?” Dream said, the word echoing. He glanced over at Techno, who huffed and shook his shoulders in a mockery of a shrug.

“They want to be let in,” Niki said from behind Ranboo, “and they aren’t taking ‘no’ for an answer.”

“Who?” Dream said, his voice again above a whisper.

Niki opened her mouth, but a cry from the kitchen cut her off.

“Skeppy?!”

## Chapter End Notes

ἰὺ ἥ-οἱ π' ἄψ ὅτ' ἰσθῶς, ἄψ φέψ ὅτ' ἰσθῶς. - If you're lying, we tell Niki.

𐎧𐎠𐎡𐎹'𐎠𐎡𐎹 - Don't die

$\triangle \wedge \sqcup \neq \cap \perp \ominus \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \triangle \asymp \psi \nmid \neq \circ \circ \text{!}\lambda$ . - And you both are my kin.

ᐱᕈᑦ ᐸᓂ ᐃᐱᓂ ᐸᓂᐅᓂᐳ}, ᐸᓂᐃᓂᐸᓂᐳ? - You're mine and peace's, remember?

$\Xi \cup \Delta$  中所有  $H \cap J$  中  $\overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Delta \setminus \overline{\Phi}$ ?  $H \cap J$  中所有  $\overline{\Phi}$  与  $\Delta \cap \Omega \setminus UH$  的交非空  $\subseteq$  与  $V \setminus \Delta \cap I \cap A$

$\equiv \Psi \mathcal{S} \subseteq \sim \Psi \mathcal{S} U \nVdash \exists \lambda \sigma \models \triangleleft \wedge \sqsubseteq \Psi \rightsquigarrow \Psi$ . - How did you do that? You didn't exactly finish explaining before flying down here.

$\exists i \exists \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Delta \rightarrow \exists \Psi \rightarrow \overline{\Phi} \cap \exists \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Delta \wedge i \overline{\Phi} \} \cap \exists \Psi \} ?$  - Is it harder to do than it sounds?

[illegible]



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you wanted. Isn't that what you did to Techno? To your 'best friend'? Get what you  
wanted and then toss them aside? If that's what you do to your allies, what would you  
have done to Dream and those of us who were less than that to you?

ጥጥረው ላለችው! ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው ጥጥረው  
COME HERE BEFORE HE TRIES TO FLY ON HIS OWN!

# Unexpected Visitors, the Good, the Bad, and the Problem

## Chapter Summary

Skeppy complicates matters. But he's not the only one...

## Chapter Notes

This chapter beat me black and blue. And then lore tried to finish me off. But I succeeded. Maybe. Kinda. This chapter is out, so something was accomplished.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream dashed out of the room and towards the kitchen. He stopped in the doorway and stared at the short diamond golem hugging Bad tightly.

“Don’t ever do that again!” Skeppy said, pulling away long enough to wag a finger at Bad and then going back to squeeze the life out of the demon. Bad had a large grin on his face, and his deceptively thin black arms bent down to wrap around the short, sparkling figure.

“I won’t,” Bad said. Skeppy released one of his arms and punched Bad’s side. “Ow! Why’d you do that?”

“So you remember, you idiot,” said Skeppy stepping back. Bad rubbed his side.

“That was unnecessary,” Bad said with an attempt at a scowl, but the grin kept popping back. “Dream! Look who stopped by!”

Obsidian eyes turned to Dream, and Dream quickly slipped his mask back over his face.

“Hi, Skeppy,” he said neutrally.

“Dream!” the diamond golem said with genuine excitement. He skipped over and wrapped his arms around Dream’s chest, which was as high as he could reach. “Thank you! You’re likely the only reason this idiot is still on the server.”

“He’s the reason I’m still here too,” Dream dared to whisper. Skeppy’s smile sparkled. He reached up and somehow managed to pat Dream’s blond hair.

“Of course he is,” said Skeppy. “You two idiots have always helped keep each other in check. Hope you don’t mind if I butt in.”

Memories of sparkling laughter caused Dream’s arms briefly to encircle the heavy hybrid.

“No. Thank you for coming,” Dream said softly. He slipped out of Skeppy’s hold and stood a bit closer to the still-grinning Bad. “How did you find us?”

“That idiot forgot that he gave Sappy a compass in case of emergencies when the kindling was a little brat instead of a big one,” Skeppy explained. “Took forever to get him to calm down enough to remember he had it though. Seriously he didn’t remember until Ant came back missing his Dream one.”

“Sapnap?” Dream asked, his whole body tensing.

“Yeah,” Skeppy said. The sparkling dulled slightly. “Speaking of—”

“Dream!” cried a too-familiar voice. A figure hurtled towards him, and Dream dodged the attack. He ran past Skeppy, familiar footsteps echoing his. “Dream! Come back!”

“Sappy! I told you to wait!” Skeppy called, his voice growing fainter as Dream ran down the basement stairs.

“Not now, Unlce Skep!” that familiar voice called out too close. Vaulting the last few steps, Dream passed a chest, quickly snatched the flint and steel out of it, and dove towards the renewed portal. Purple swirled, and Dream stood in the swirl long enough to see a white bandana flutter into the basement. The purple filled his vision, and heat assaulted him.

His hands shook as he pulled out a pickax. With practiced hands, he dug down and prayed he wouldn't fall into—His breath caught, and his body froze. No. He had to move. The hunter was coming. He'd find Dream. Dream had to—had to hide. Placing the blocks above him, he dug forward. Forward was good. Safe. He'd see the magma coming.

“Dream! Come out!” called a muffled voice from a few blocks above. “As fun as it'd be to play manhunt, I just want to talk. Come on, Dream. Please. I don't have a compass anymore. You—you broke it, remember? Just let me talk. We're—we're best friends. Please.”

Dream's breaths came out stuttered, a hard promise pressing hard against his lungs. He couldn't come out. He couldn't.

“Where is he?” said a hot hiss. A wordless cry and bang shook the blocks overhead. Dream dropped into a crouch and held himself still. His breath burned in his lungs.

“What are you doing?” came a flat voice from a little further. Dream popped up his head to better hear the voice's words. Techno?

“I'm looking for Dream,” Sap—the hot voice crackled. “You know, my best friend.”

“Best friend?” Techno snorted. Dream was very familiar with that snort. He stretched out further. “That's a new development. This is the first time in months I have seen you anywhere near him.”

“How would you know that?” the blaze hybrid accused.

“I’m starting to think the demon omelet-pleaser dropped you on your head too many times as a child.”

“Don’t call him that!” the blaze-hybrid roared.

“Would you prefer former Egg-cult leader? Or the Black Hood? Would it be better if I lied and called him the Eggbeater? Since we’re going about mis-labeling people.”

“I’m not mis-labeling anyone!” A clash sounded behind the words, and Dream cringed.

“Yeah. Best friends are people who go around avoiding you and pretending you don’t exist for months on end. How could I forget?” A thud sounded almost exactly overhead.

“It’s none of your business,” flared from directly over Dream, an audible struggle in the fizz.

“Unfortunately for you, it is.” Metal rang against metal, and straining grunts loudly vibrated in Dream’s ears. “See, your so-called best friend is part of my passel. Which means he is a brother to me in all but blood. So when his so-called best friend deigns to show up in our house and chase him it out of it, it becomes my business.”

"Don't call him that!" whistled the hiss.

"What? Brother?"

“He’s not your brother!” Another crash and then a thump thudded further from Dream and the portal. A groaning grunt followed.

“Unfortunately for you, he is. Get out of here, Aeneas.”

“My name is Sapnap!” the grumbling, fraught voice cried. “Stop giving people weird Greek names! That’s probably why Tommy is haunting you guys in the first place.”

“You saw Theseus,” Techno said flatly. A cry came from the voice.

“Yeah. He said to stay away,” the fizzing voice grit out. “That you’re all mad.”

“Apparently wordplay isn’t completely lost on him,” Techno continued. “Get out of here. And don’t come back.”

“No,” the voice fizzed and crackled. “Dream’s my friend. *My best friend*. Even if you leave me here and break your portal, I know the coordinates to your house, and I’ll keep coming back. I’m not leaving until I talk to Dream and make sure he’s okay.”

“What is it with idiots and revealing their plans,” Techno muttered with almost banal curiosity. “One question: why? You didn’t 'make sure he's okay' before.”

“I know all right! I know I didn’t—but he’s still my best friend. And I won’t give up on him.”

“Like you gave up on him before?”

“I didn’t—He told us he hated us!” the voice sputtered. “I thought—you know what, I don’t have to explain myself to you!”

“You don’t,” Techno said flatly. Dangerously so. Dream’s pickaxe reflexively fell back into his hand, but he instantly vanished it back into his inventory. “What you do and think are your business. My business is keeping trouble away from mine. Did you bring a bed?”

“A bed? Why would I—agh!” The distinct sound of tearing cloth and flesh.

“Come back, and I’ll make it canon,” Techno said bluntly. Another wordless cry followed by a wet slash. A gurgling hiss sizzled and then vanished. “You can come out now.”

“Sorry about him,” Skeppy’s voice came from the portal. “I told him to wait outside.”

“He shouldn’t have come,” Techno grunted.

“I had hoped he would have put more effort into this,” Skeppy said dully. “But apparently he decided it was better to be an idiot.”

“We need to keep him away from Dream for the time being,” Bad said, his voice growing louder and moving closer. “Speaking of, I think he’s using an old trick of his.”

“Imitating a squirrel in the walls of the nether?”

“Yep,” Bad said from right above Dream. “Dream! Can you hear me?! Come out, you muffin! It’s just us! Let’s go home before my muffins get burned!”

Taking a deep breath, Dream slipped the pickax back into his hand. He dug straight up.

“Ack!” Bad said as he took some hoping half-steps to keep from falling head-first in Dream’s hole. “How do you do that? Seriously give a guy a warning before you burst out of the ground.”

“Sorry,” Dream said wobbly. Bad sighed and helped Dream up onto the flat ground.

“It’s fine. I should have known better,” Bad said. He held onto Dream’s hand. “You okay?”

“...he’s going to come back.”

“Not if he values his canon lives,” Techno said. He kept his eyes on Bad. “Anyone who threatens my passel will not live to regret it.”

“Sappy’s a good kid at heart, but he’s got the self-preservation of a lemming when he thinks he’s right,” Skeppy said, the diamond golem glinting and dulling over the course of his body. “You should have seen the trouble he got up to as a kindling. Pretty sure Bad nearly cursed him to sit still for the rest of eternity at least three dozen times.”

“He threatened me a couple of times too,” Dream said quietly.

“Pretty sure he thought you and Sap were going to cause each other’s mutual destruction,” Skeppy said. “I told him you would keep each other alive. Best friend ‘till the end, like me and Bad.” All the glittering ceased. “Guess we were both wrong.”

Dream’s hands twitched, and he hesitantly moved towards the diamond golem. He stood twitchily next to Skeppy. He straightened and side-stepped in front Bad (who he had accidentally dragged behind him).

“Did you come here to hurt Bad?” Dream asked firmly.

“What?! No. I wouldn’t—” Skeppy cut himself off and shook his head. “With the Egg, I would have. It made me—I made me hard and cruel. Bad too. We messed up, listening to that thing. The first time I’ve been able to think clearly was that moment where you destroyed it. I wasn’t there physically. I was—doing something else for the Egg. But I remembered what I had done, what Bad had done, and all I wanted to do was make sure everyone was alright. But then you disappeared, and Bad didn’t stick around long enough for me to be sure—he didn’t let me get close actually before disappearing. By the time I figured out he had left, I had no way to track him. That’s why I set various rewards for any information or leads. Had to make it sound like I wanted to hurt him because people would be more likely give me information if I worded it like that. But he’s my best friend. I would never let anyone hurt him, or blame him for something everyone else did. Sure, Bad fell to the Egg first, but outside of Tommy and you guys, everyone else did.”

“Phil didn’t,” Techno snorted.



“Isn’t Phil with you guys?” Skeppy asked, obsidian eyes somehow flattening. “I figured he’d be here recovering too, if anywhere.”

“The Egg got to him,” Bad said softly. “The way it got Tommy. Nearly took down Dream’s group from within.”

“What happened to him?”

“He let himself be killed,” Techno said in an unperturbed monotone. “Only way to save us.”

“Oh,” Skeppy said. He shuffled to the side and gently held out a hand. Techno watched the movement but didn’t move. The dully sparkling hand settled on Techno’s arm. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Are you?” Techno said blankly. He stepped out from under Skeppy’s hand. “Weren’t you worried about muffins burning?”

“My muffins!” Bad cried. He pulled Dream hurriedly towards the portal. “Move it! Those are my special carrot recipe!”

“Carrot?” Skeppy said, quickly matching their pace. “You made carrot-cake muffins?”

“How many times do I have to tell you that they’re not carrot cake! They’re muffins! Those’re two entirely different things!”

“Pretty sure they both taste like carrot cake.”

“Oh yeah?” Bad scoffed, the purple swirls engulfing them. “How about I get Niki to make a real carrot cake so you can taste the difference then?”

“Sounds good to me. Two cakes for the price of one.”

“For the last time, they’re muffins, not cake!”

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Tapping a finger on thin air, Dream reattached the collapsed code and gently guided it into propping itself back up. The familiar nearly invisible zeros and ones expanded and connected to all the remnants of the former command.

“What are you doing?”

Familiar white and red numbers block his vision. Dream blinked.

“You’re back?”

Transparent blue eyes stare at him hard, but eventually Tommy nodded.

“It’s not like I have anywhere else to go,” Tommy grumbled. The blue eyes stare expectantly at Dream. Oh. Last night. And the night before that, and the night before that...guess those weren’t weird dreams.

Dream opens his mouth but then bites back the question.

“If you says so,” he manages instead.

“I do say so,” Tommy said with his arms crossed and floating right in front of the re-formed barrier blocks. “I also said ‘What are you doing?’”

“Keeping unwanted visitors out,” Dream said, his voice low.

“What unwanted visitors?”

“Dream!” cried a voice from the nearby forest. That voice again. He gazed at the approaching figure. “Wait! I just want to talk!”

“Oh, I see,” Tommy said nearly as flatly as Techno. “Those kinds.”

The blaze hybrid in the white bandana ran smack into the invisible barrier wall and fell flat on his butt.

“Ow!” The blaze hybrid stumbled back onto his feet and shook off the snow from his clothes. “What was that?”

“Dunno. Maybe they're the barrier blocks I mentioned surrounding Dream's house,” Tommy said still fairly flatly. He floated upside down. “But don't take the word of a dead guy, try running into them again.”

Dream stared at the upside-down ghost. Had he been spending a lot of time with Techno?

“Barrier blocks?” Sap asked puzzled. “These weren't here before.”

“He's been here already?” Tommy asked. “When did that happen?”

Still staring at Tommy, Dream answered, “Yesterday.”

“And you waited until f— today to put the barrier up?”

Dream shrugged. “I thought it would take him several more days to come back.”

“I slept in a village somewhat nearby,” the blaze hybrid said. “Come on, Dream. Don’t be like this. Let me in.”

“Why do you want in here?” asked Tommy. “The—it’s gone. You can go wherever you like.”

“What I’d like is for Dream to stop running away,” the blaze hybrid crackled. Flame-licked eyes glared into Dream’s mask. “Dream, please. We’re friends.”

“We were,” Dream whispered, the words tasting like ash. He turned and walked quickly towards the house.

“I’m sorry, okay?! Whatever I did—whatever George and I did to make you mad, we’re sorry! We won’t do it again. Just come back here and talk to me!”

“Yeah, I’m going to give that apology a you-suck-at-apologies out of you-don’t-even-sound-like-you-mean-it,” Tommy said as he trailed after Dream. The next words sounded like they came out of cupped hands. “Next time actually sound like you f— mean it.”

“Shut the h— up! I wasn’t talking to you!”

“Considering the one you want to talk to is done. I thought you’d prefer someone who’s actually willing to talk to you. But since you don’t, bye!”

Dream opened the door and walked into the house. He slid to the floor and leaned against the now-closed door. A dangling knee knocked his head forward, and Tommy twisted and looked him over with concerned blue eyes.

“Sorry. Forgot I could touch you.”

Waving the ghost off, Dream knocked the back of his head back against the wood door.

“Dream, you’re already done?” Niki said entering the hallway to the entrance. Flour and several flicks of orange splattered her apron and clothes. “Want to help me and Peace put the finishing touches on the carrot cake?”

“Papa,” ran a little piglin slathered in white flour, cream batter, and various sizes of orange carrot strands everywhere. He leapt into his father’s lap. “Cake! An' carrots! Gooder than muffins!”

“We don’t know if they’re better than Bad's muffins,” Niki said in a pleased voice, “but I wouldn’t call them worse.”

Dream nodded, his throat locked again. Niki’s pleased grin curdled a little, but it held firm. It twisted oddly as brown eyes looked over Dream’s shoulder.

“Tommy,” Niki almost asked. “You’re back! Would you like some cake?”

“Not gonna lie, cake sounds pretty good right now. Especially after the sour we encountered outside.”

“Outside?” Niki said, the twisting transforming the grin into a full frown.

“Some idiot yelling empty apologies. Saying s—”

“Language,” Niki interrupted.

“Oh, come on. Not you too!”

“Look, I can care less,” Niki said with an eye roll. “Curse all you want. But not in front of Peace. He’s a quick study.”

“Ship!” Peace parroted from his cradle in Dream’s arms. Dream’s mask pointedly faced Tommy.

“Ship. Right. Got it,” Tommy said a bit more subdued. He muttered something that Dream covered Peace’s ears from and continued, “The point is there’s an idiot outside that’s saying *ship* about wanting to apologize and talk to Dream. Pretty sure Dream put up the barrier again because he’s done with *ship* like that.”

“Ship! Ship!” Peace repeated eagerly, glancing around at everyone to see their reactions. He scowled a little and grunted purposefully. Dream gently flicked the back of Peace’s head. Peace gave a little surprised squeal and blinked innocently up at Dream. Dream sighed and knocked his masked face against Peace’s.

“You put back up the barrier?” Niki asked. Dream looked up at her through his mask.

“They know where we are. It was safer,” Dream explained. He hugged Peace slightly tighter. “I can give you access to leave if you want.”

“No. That’s fine. We can go out through the nether. Techno broke the original portal that spawned and moved the new one to a hidden location. It should be safe to travel through there,” Niki said. Her brown eyes clouded. “It’ll be a bit harder to re-open my bakery if everyone decides to come after you, but we’ll figure it out. For right now, there is a cake to decorate.”

“Dibs on the white frosting!” Tommy cried as he zipped past Niki.

“No you don’t,” Niki said sharply. She ran back into the kitchen. “All of the frosting is white!”

“Guess everyone else is out of luck then,” Tommy yelled back.

“No! Cake!” Peace cried, flailing his arms in the direction of the kitchen from Dream’s lap. With soft chuff, Dream picked up Peace and headed towards the kitchen.

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“He’s still out there.”

Dream lifted his head up out of the book to see Skeppy at the library’s entrance. Ender hissed from where he was curled around his own book next to Dream’s chair. Fully placing his mask over his face, Dream whispered his own hiss. A tail wrapped around his ankle.

“He really does want to make up with you,” Skeppy continued. “I wouldn’t have brought him otherwise.”

“You needed his compass,” Dream said tonelessly.

“Yes and no,” Skeppy said, his shoulders going up one up and the other down. The motion repeated backwards. “I mean...it might have been more my compass after he accidentally lost it.”

Dream let his mask stare. Skeppy’s shoulders slumped.

“Bad’s my best friend,” Skeppy said softly. “I couldn’t watch his son ignore him like that.”

“He hasn’t mentioned Bad.”

“He hasn’t,” Skeppy admitted. “I was hoping seeing Bad would snap the muffin out of it.”

Dream smiled briefly at the use of Bad’s favorite word before putting his book in his lap.

“I...,” Dream started. He chewed on his next words, but he let them go. “I don’t want to see him.”

“Okay. Alright,” Skeppy said. He plopped down on Dream’s unoccupied side. “Why? You were best friends. Practically brothers. What—what happened?”

He liked Skeppy. But—Dream tightened his grip around his book. Ender hissed at the man from Dream’s other side. The hiss cut off, and the tail’s grip squeezed.

“Why do you want to know?” Ranboo asked, his voice colder than Dream had heard before.

“I watched them grow up,” Skeppy answered. The obsidian eyes stared at glittering hands. “I always thought of them as a—a mirror of my friendship with Bad. Sap’s like me, the friend who loves to mess with the other to see his reactions. And Dream’s the patient friend who puts up with it and secretly enjoys the chaos. It’s—jarring to see their friendship in ruins.”

“They’re not you and Bad,” Ranboo said in a hard tone. “They’re their own people. With their own sort of friendship. Their friendship crumbling has nothing to do with yours.”

“That’s not it,” Skeppy said, his voice rising. “I know they’re their own people! I get that. I know their friendship isn’t ours. But I also know how much Bad loves Sappy, and how much he cares about Dream. I don’t want him to have to choose one over the other. I don’t want to choose one over the other.”

Ranboo opened his mouth, but Dream gripped his shoulder. Straightening, Dream tilted his mask fully at Skeppy.



“He left me,” Dream said, the words as monotone as he could get them. How did Techno manage? His stomach roiled, and his blood burned. The mask continued to stare at Skeppy as Dream’s eyes shut. He tried to picture nothing but lightly glowing darkness. “We promised to have each other’s backs. I tried to keep my end. I *tried*. But I couldn’t always side with him. Not when he killed pets and grieved people for no real reason. This was my server. I had to protect it.

“And then came the L’Manberg war. Sap...he almost sided with L’Manberg. He would have if Wilbur hadn’t refused him saying that L’Manberg wasn’t for American-accented people. Sap—he told me later he just wanted to see what they were up to, and I...I tried to believe him. I did.

“And then George did a bad job as king, and I had to dethrone him for his own protection and that of the server’s. And Sapnap...he got mad at me. He sided with George saying I was being a bad friend. That *I* had changed. Neither of them tried to help me keep peace on the server unless they felt it was fun, but *I* was the bad friend. George started to spend less and less time awake, and Sapnap...he went off to do his own thing. He started to only come back if others asked him to. He barely spoke to me. And then Tommy—” The word cut off. Dream’s eyes opened to see obsidian eyes focused on him. Obsidian. Dream’s stomach dropped, and he attempted to move away. A lanky body prevented him from moving further away from the obsidian.

Long arms wrapped around his shoulders, and a hiss blew itself near his ear. He could almost make out Ender warbled right beside his cheek. The obsidian backed away, and a softness rubbed against Dream’s face. The softness stopped, and a weight shifted behind Dream and pressed into his shoulder.

“...you okay?” a quiet voice whispered in Human. It sounded like it contained a bite. Dream nodded numbly. “No. Don’t lie. Are you okay? Because Ender’s close to trying to mine for diamonds from that golem. And I’m not sure I want to stop him.”

“Don’t,” Dream said firmly, even as every breath burned. He wrangled them and steadied them. “Uncl—Skeppy’s done nothing wrong.”

“That’s a lie if ever I ever heard one,” Skeppy interrupted, drawing Dream’s attention back to the diamond golem. A sparkling blue hand stretched towards Dream, and Dream flinched. The hand retreated. “I let Bad get sucked in by the Egg. I let myself get sucked in by the Egg. And even before that, I failed to knock some sense into Sappy. I followed Bad into stepping away from the conflicts of the server instead of helping you with them. Sure, we’ve never been the best of friends, but you mean a lot to Bad, which means you should mean a lot to me. Sappy does.”

“You wanted to be with your best friend,” Dream said almost evenly. He only hitched at the last two words. “No one can fault that.”

“I can,” Skeppy argued. “And I will. I’m going to blame myself so hard that I’ll work three times as hard to make it up to you both. No, fourteen times as hard!”

A small burst of breath huffed from Dream’s lips. “Don’t tell Bad that.”

“Oh, I will,” the diamond golem glittered brightly. He smirked obsidian. “And after he stops yelling, I’m going to give him enough ingredients for fourteen batches of muffins. He’ll probably blow another gasket, but then we’ll have two weeks of consecutive muffins!”

“You’re such a troll,” Dream muttered, rolling his unseen eyes.

“And proud of it! Come on,” Skeppy prompted reaching for Dream’s arm. Ender hissed over Dream’s shoulder, but Skeppy just stuck out his tongue and grabbed Dream anyway. Dream let the diamond golem pull him to his feet, which resulted in Ender hissingly following suit. “Show me how to get out of here so I can get those ingredients!”

Dream stood still, and Skeppy stopped his pulling. The obsidian eyes stared at his mask, and Dream pried his lips open. Nothing came out. Skeppy’s grin shrunk and curled, and the short golem stood and patted Dream’s hair.

“Now that I think about it,” Skeppy said as he grinned up at Dream and dusted Dream’s sleeve. “If I disappear, Bad’s gonna get suspicious, and that muffin’s not as dumb as he acts

like sometimes. He'll figure out something's up, and that would ruin the effect—I mean, the surprise. Yeah, let's go with that.”

Dream's open lips closed and stretched into a hidden smile.

“So why don't you let your little helper there go out and get them for me then?”

Ender hissed.

“𐀀𐀁𐀂 𐀃𐀄𐀅'𐀆 𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎 𐀏𐀐 𐀑𐀒𐀓 𐀔𐀕𐀖.”

“𐀗𐀘 𐀙𐀚𐀛'𐀜,” Dream hissed. He pulled out his comm and typed a message. Green and red eyes stared at the small device. “𐀝𐀞 𐀟𐀠𐀡 𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨.”

Ender warbled and blinked.

“Why do you want us to go?” asked Ranboo.

“It's not so much that I want you to go,” Skeppy said. His eyes glinted at Dream. “But I think it would make it easier to surprise Bad. Plus I don't think Sappy would get in your way if you go out to collect ingredients.”

“Oh,” Ranboo breathed and nodded. “Okay. If Dream says it's okay, we'll go get them.”

Dream huffed. “Just don't tell Bad.”

“I won't,” Ranboo said eagerly.

Turning to Ranboo, Dream nodded firmly.

“𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌?” Dream hissed. Ranboo smiled widely.

“𐄌 𐄌𐄌𐄌𐄌,” Ranboo warbled a little wobbily. He leaned forward and rubbed Dream’s cheek.

“𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌𐄌𐄌 𐄌𐄌𐄌𐄌𐄌.”

“You know it’s rude to talk in front of someone in a language they don’t understand, right?” Skeppy interrupted in a grumbling mumble.

“We’re agreeing to your plan,” Dream said. “If you would rather we didn’t—”

“Yeah, yeah. I get it,” Skeppy said quickly. He glittered. “Talk in hisses and warbles all you want, as long as we get two weeks of Bad’s muffins.”

“You’re doing this to mess with Bad, not for the muffins,” Dream said flatly.

“Of course I want to mess with Bad. It’s the basis of our friendship! But you can’t tell me you’re going to be upset with two weeks of muffins.”

“Ender’s pretty sure Bad uses demon magic to make them more tasty,” Ranboo confessed.

Another burst of breath escaped Dream, and Skeppy glittered in satisfaction.

“I don’t blame him. No one can resist Bad’s muffins. I’m dead serious about that. I’ve seen him win over enemies with them. I’ve even tried to copy the recipe, but they didn’t come out half as good. He has to be cheating with magic.”

“Maybe,” Dream said, remembering the half burnt muffins Bad had choked down after Skeppy’s last attempt before they got him to stop.

“What have you muffins been up to?” Bad said as he entered the library, wide white eyes narrowed. “Are you up to something, Skeppy?”

“I’m hurt you enter a room and the first thing you ask is if I’m up to something.”

“If you weren’t being such a suspicious muffin—”

“I’m just standing here talking to Dream and Ranboo! How’s that suspicious?!”

“You’re glittering!”

“I glitter when I’m happy! Are you saying you don’t want me to be happy, Bad?”

“That’s not it,” Bad countered. “This isn’t your happy glittering! This is the ‘I’m-going-to-muffin-with-Bad’ glittering!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t have a ‘I’m-going-to-muffin-with-Bad’ glittering!”

“Yes you do!”

The two continued to argue. Skeppy glittered and shone. Bad huffed, growled, and smiled. Slinking backwards, Dream watched them. Warmth glowed and burned in the pit of Dream’s stomach.

Tickling softness brushed of Dream's ankle and onto his wrist.

“𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂?” Ranboo wobbily warbled.

“𐄂𐄂𐄂,” Dream breathed. He tugged the tail and lead Ranboo out into the hallway, leaving the squabbling best friends behind.

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Peace snorted and shoved his head under Dream's chin. Dream adjusted his grip on his child and tilted his book a bit more to the left. The tiny piglin snuggled deeper into Dream's chest and breathed deeply.

“SKEPPY!”

A tiny forehead crashed against Dream's chin. He grunted. A soft squeal whined from his lap. With a sigh, Dream dropped his book. He gently ran his fingers over the tiny skull, but the skull had remained fairly smooth. Snuffling sniffles pressed into his chest, and Dream slowly pried the tiny face away from his rough spun shirt and checked it over. Outside of tears streaking down it, the tiny face had no concerning marks. He leaned down and touched his forehead to the small one. The sniffing lessened, and tiny arms wrapped around Dream's chest.

“Hurt,” the tiny voice chuffed. Dream puffed a breath into the tiny face and bumped the tiny snout.

“You'll be okay,” he whispered. “Papa's here.”

The wet eyes blinked, and a wide grin formed beneath them.

“Yes! Papa here!” Peace cried, pressing his forehead and snout harder onto Dream. A chuffing chuckle puffed out of Dream’s lips. The tiny body sank against his again. “Papa here.”

The sounds of footsteps thundered from the hallway, and Dream pulled away and placed his mask back on his face.

“GET BACK HERE YOU MUFFIN!”

“Hide me hide me hide me!” yelled Skeppy, dashing into the library and diving behind Dream. A fuming Bad stormed in behind him.

“Don’t use Dream as a shield, and come clean up your mess!” Bad cried, marching to the table in the center of the room.

“What did he do?” asked Dream.

“He gave me ingredients to make fourteen batches of muffins, and when I refused to make them, he splattered all of the muffin stuff everywhere!”

Dream’s mask looked back at Skeppy, and Dream stood up. Peace grunted angrily.

“That wasn’t what we agreed to,” Dream said calmly. He spun back to face the diamond golem. “Consider our deal null and void.”

“Wait! You knew he was going to do this?” Bad accused. Flinching, Dream shuffled and looked over his shoulder at Bad.

“He promised two weeks of muffins,” Dream whispered. Bad groaned.

“You could have just asked!” Bad scolded. His frown tilted upwards. “Tell you what, you promise not to help Skeppy troll me, and I’ll make you all the muffins you want.”

A loud explosion rumbled through the blocks beneath them. In two smooth motions, he plopped Peace in Bad’s long arms and dashed around the demon. Dream ran out of the house. He jerked sideways as a pink figure matched his steps. Technoblade. Dream increased his pace.

The blocks beneath them jerked and shook, but both warriors remained on their feet. They reached the edge of the barrier at the same time. A boom pierced shockwaves through the barrier blocks. A mad cackling crackled below the multiple explosions.

“Hey, Dream! I took a page out of your ‘new’ brother’s book. Took me a while, but look! I summoned a wither! And I have more where they came from! If you don’t let me in to talk to you, I’ll keep spawning them. How many do you think your precious barrier blocks can handle?”

“He’s gone f— insane,” said Tommy, somehow appearing on Dream’s unoccupied side. The teen’s lowered voice added. “Like Wilbur.”

Dream hesitated and then let his fingers loop around Tommy’s wrist. Blue eyes fluttered in quick blinks before focusing on Dream. The masked face tilted, and Tommy grumbled.

“I’m fine.”

“The question isn’t whether the barrier blocks will hold. It’s what are you going to do once your invis pots are used up?” asked Techno with a bored expression. His hands gripped the handle of the Orphan Obliterator. Ringing began to interfere with Dream’s already bombarded hearing. “That’s of course assuming you have more sense than this idiotic plan suggests and brought more than one invis. Not that it’ll matter, since if the withers don’t do you in, I will. You’ll have to let me know how a canon death differs from a respawn.”

“Why don’t you tell me?! Why don’t you come out and try to kill me, Piggy?”



Techno's fingers jammed at one of the barrier blocks, and its code began to unravel. Dream snatched Techno's hand away from the code with one hand and the other stabilized the barrier block.

"He's got 3 lives. He loses one, and maybe he'll stop being a moron," Techno said, his monotone underlined by a growl.

"He's not the one I'm worried about," Dream murmured, keeping a hold on Techno's errant hand. The piglin hybrid thankfully stilled. Dream raised his voice. "Why are you doing this Sapnap? You've had months to find me and talk to me. Why are you going this far now?!"

"Oh, so now you're willing to talk to me! Once your so-called 'new brother' nearly removes your barrier blocks to kill me! You give him f— coding privileges, which you never trusted me with, but I guess letting him kill your 'former' brother is too much, huh?" Sapnap yelled. The blaze hybrid's words remained clear through the ringing and vibrating booms, and Dream's feet slid backwards. "It's alright. You can let him out here. You *were* my best friend. But since you aren't anymore, you don't have to hold your new bestie back. Let him come out here! Let him try to take me on."

A low grumbling growl reverberated from Techno, and Dream noticed his fingers digging into Techno's arm.

"What? You suddenly chicken, Piggy?" Sapnap taunted. Even with his current state of invisibility, Dream knew the blaze hybrid's face was red and his grin was manically wide

"Sappy, what are you doing!?" The diamond golem ran into Dream's periphery vision. "Don't be a complete idiot! What do you think this f- mess is going to accomplish?"

"What are you talking about, Uncle Skep? He's standing right there," said the invisible man, his arm likely stretched towards Dream. "He even asked me questions. He's talking to me. That's a step up from hiding behind invisible walls and only sending his creepy enderman goon to collect supplies."

A hiss added to the growing noise surrounding Dream, and a black arm pushed itself between Dream and the barrier. As if Dream needed an extra layer of protection from the unhinged invisible blaze hybrid. From the man he had once thought his best friend and brother. Dream's breaths pushed harder into a convulsing chest.

"If anyone has goons, it's me," said Techno. A white-sleeved elbow harmlessly pushed Dream back a block, and the piglin hybrid blocked more of Dream's view of empty air. "Not that Ranboo's anyone's goon. He's got better standards than that."

"You've completely lost it, man," Tommy scoffed, floating over Techno and Ranboo's heads. "Get lost, b—."

"Language," called Bad. Long, sharp fingers curved into Dream's shoulder lightly. "Sappy. Stop. You're hurting—"

"I don't want to talk to you, Egg-lover," Sapnap snapped. The fingers curled and slid off Dream's cloak. Dream's breathing stopped and then burst out. He ducked under the two arms and stood under Tommy's dangling feet.

"Enough!" Dream snapped back. He straightened to his full height, knowing it left a couple inches between the top on his head and Sapnap's. He tilted his mask the proper amount upwards. "Consider this your warning, Sapnap, former founding member of the Greatest SMP." The title came out without an audible tremor, and Dream pushed forward. "If you threaten me or mine ever again, it will be considered an action of aggression, and we *will* respond in kind."

"Ooo, someone's in trouble," Tommy sing-songed. "You brought out Dream's serious voice. Which means you're f—, b—."

Dream looked up at the grinning teen. The teen tilted his grin down to Dream.

"You're going to 'respond in kind,'" Sapnap crackled. "And that means what? You want a white flag? A white flag *from me*? It's like you don't know me at all. You don't want to talk,

fine. I'm done trying to talk. I'm going to put a sword to your neck and make you listen to me!"

A tug on his arm had Dream faltering backwards and behind a red cape.

"You know that doesn't make sense, right? If you want him to listen, sword or not, you're going to have to talk. Not that you're going to get close enough to even try," Techno said deceptively evenly. "Also your invis has run out."

"Wha—" Sapnap started as his outline became visible pressed up against the other side of the barrier blocks. An explosion burst right over his head. With a yelp, he stumbled and fell backwards. Blood streaked down his face, but he ignored it and scurried upwards. He jumped away from the block he was standing on fast enough to be thrown forward instead of upwards by the next explosion. The wither's three heads gutturally grumbled at Sapnap, and the creature floated after him. Sapnap ran.

Dream watched as the blaze hybrid ran through the rapidly melting snow wall. His hands shook. He fisted and tightened them into his cloak, but then his cloak quivered. Something touched his arm, and he leapt away from it. He made to dash to the house, but long arms surrounded him and held him in place.

"I'm sorry," Bad whispered in Dream's ear. A long wide tail encircled his back. "I'm so sorry."

It wasn't Bad's fault. It wasn't...wasn't...was it?

"...did I...did I do the right thing?" Dream whispered softly.

"I don't know," Bad answered. His arms tightened around Dream. "But I know you did your best. That was enough, 'kay?"

Dream pressed his mask against Bad's hoodie. He knew it wasn't enough. It never was.

## Chapter End Notes

ḤṼṼ ḤṼṼ'Ṽ ḥṼṼṼṼṼṼ ṼṼṼ ṼṼṼṼ ṼṼṼ. – You won't separate me from him.

ṼṼ ḤṼṼ'Ṽ. – He won't.

ḤṼṼ ṼṼṼ ṼṼṼṼṼṼ. – You can teleport.

ṼṼ ṼṼṼṼṼṼṼṼ? – Be careful?

Ṽ ḤṼṼṼ – I will

ṼṼṼṼ ṼṼṼṼṼ ṼṼṼṼṼṼṼṼ. – Bring back things.

ṼṼ ṼṼṼṼṼṼṼṼ? – Go outside?

ḤṼṼ – Yes

# The Problems with Comings and Goings

## Chapter Summary

People come, and people go. And Dream is still learning to trust those who stay.

## Chapter Notes

Wanted to get this published before the New Year.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m telling you: this is not like him at all,” the diamond golem didn’t scream, but it was a near thing. “Something’s going on. I need to go and find out. What if we have another Egg-like infestation?”

The hand on Dream’s shoulder squeezed, and Dream’s fingers reached up and hovered over the ghostly ones. He hesitantly pressed the cold fingers under his. The grip loosened.

“But Skeppy, if anyone should go, it should be me,” Bad argued. Dream’s breath hitched, and the fingers under his slipped out and intertwined with his instead. He wanted to look over at the teen ghost, but he couldn’t tear his eyes away from the tall demon pacing the living room in front of Skeppy. “He’s my son! And if anyone should go after him, it’s me.”

“You can’t,” Dream said. His voice cracked. White eyes snapped towards him. He straightened and pulled his hand and the one tangled with it to his side. “Sapnap is not the only one in the Greater SMP that would call you ‘Egg-lover.’”

Bad flinched and then sighed.

“He’s my son. It’s a risk I’m willing to take if I can knock some sense into him.”

“So you’re willing to get yourself killed just to find out that f— b— of a ‘son’ is a f— b—,” Tommy grumbled loudly over Dream’s shoulder.

“Language!” Bad snapped. He slumped into a slouch. His whole face drew in shadows as his eyes closed. “It’s not just Sap. Other than me and Dream, name another person who is skilled enough to detect the presence of another Egg-like virus?”

“Easy. Me,” Skeppy jumped in. “You weren’t the only one with former Admin privileges who fell under the Egg’s influence.”

“You only fell because I insisted,” Bad argued.

“Don’t. Don’t do that,” Skeppy said, his tone grating lowly. “Stop taking all the blame. You need to learn to share! Okay, you introduced me to the Egg. So? Everyone brought their friends to the Egg eventually. And like everyone who was brought to the Egg, I made the choice to believe its empty promises. It told me I would be special. That I would be its primary vassal, even over you. Sure, you’d do all the official stuff like communicating with Dream, and Tommy would be its face, but I would be its true favorite.”

The hand by Dream’s side shook, and Dream angled his body to bring the ghostly presence further behind him. Obsidian eyes dulled blankly in Bad’s direction.

“Funny thing was that it fulfilled its promise,” Skeppy’s voice dropped into an unnatural monotone that had Dream blinking code into view. Skeppy’s brilliant blue held not the smallest hint of red. “It consumed my every thought. Made sure I knew that no one else was allowed at its warped attempt at a nest. Had me waiting for it night and day in the thing. Called me its invaluable treasure in a way that—” The diamond golem’s mouth clinked closed and then creaked open. “That Mistress Megs never did.”

“Skeppy,” Bad called soft and warm. “You’re—”

“I know,” Skeppy said, the words heavy and dark. The brilliant zeros and ones faded into a tarnished cerulean. “I know. I should’ve remembered. Should’ve kept in mind that I’m not a vanity golem anymore. But I—I wanted to be someone’s treasure so bad that I—I chose to forget I already was. To you. To Sap. To Dream.” Hole-black code glistened at Dream, and Dream blinked. The obsidian glowed warmly under the shroomlights of the basement. The strangely warm black went back to Bad. “To all of my friends. But see, that’s the point. I’m pretty sure that’s what happened with all the others. We’d forgotten how important we are to one another. How everyone on this server was meant to be at least friendly with each other even if they weren’t, like, not full-out friends. We need to remember that, before something like the Egg comes back and tears us apart again.”

The shaking of Dream’s arm stilled, but Dream could only stare at the diamond golem giving his classic dopey smile to his demon best friend. He didn’t know that such a dream was impossible. (It was, wasn’t it?)

“Did that seriously come out of your mouth?” Techno said, tone between bemused and harsh. His glasses glazed over in the light. “Because I’m starting to think you are trying to set us all up for something.”

“Seriously?” Skeppy sputtered. “What do you think I could possibly be setting up?”

“Honestly not sure, but I never thought I’d hear anything that inspirational out of your mouth. At least not outside of for trolling purposes.”

Oh. That made sense. Dream’s shoulders drooped.

“I’m not trolling!” Skeppy defended, his body sparking. “Why would I do that? This is a serious situation, Technoblade, and I’m taking it seriously.”

“Sure you are,” Techno said, his tone evening out. “That’s why you want to leave the safety of our place to confront a man who released withers on his supposed best friend.”

“I’ve already said multiple times that he wouldn’t normally act like that!”

“Dream,” Techno said, and the Admin stiffened. The piglin hybrid removed his glasses and stared directly at Dream’s mask. He huffed and snorted. The message stilled the sudden rapidity of his breath. Dream tried to grunt a reply but instead squeaked. Amusement sparkled in knowing blood red eyes, and Techno gave an exceptionally low grunt. Behind the mask even Dream’s face grew hot. At least Ranboo was watching Peace in another room.

“Fine. Ask,” Dream near growled at the grinning piglin hybrid.

“Would the Nether-Spawn normally pull out a wither on his best friend?”

“During a manhunt or outside it?”

“Pretty sure Manhunts don’t count,” Techno said with an eyeroll. “If I were chasing you on a Manhunt and could summon a wither, I would.”

“As if I’d let you,” Dream snapped. Hopeful obsidian warmth turned to him. He wished he could—no. The truth would be better. Right? “He could. If he was angry enough.”

“But that’s just it,” Skeppy insisted. “Why is he ‘angry enough’? He knows—he has to—that he messed up. And he’s likely frustrated that his apology attempts are going so badly. He needs help figuring out how to communicate he’s sorry, and then bam! He’ll be back with a proper apology.”

“And if he doesn’t,” Techno said.

“Then I’ll come back and concede I was wrong.”

“You’ll *concede* you were wrong?” Techno scoffed.



“Hey! I can use big words too, you know!” Skeppy huffed. He glittered and then turned to Dream. “So how do you get out of here, Dreamling?”

His face heated again at the horribly old nickname, but he waved his free hand at the half-finished portal.

“Okay,” Skeppy nodded. “And how do I get back?”

“Yell,” Dream said. “One of us will let you in.”

“So just to be sure I understand: I stand at the edge of the border and yell and one of you idiots will let me in.”

“Either me or Dream,” Techno confirmed with a quick glance at Dream, who nodded.

“Alright then,” Skeppy said as he reached into the chest and withdrew the flint and steel and the obsidian. A long, black hand grabbed his wrist.

“Skeppy,” Bad said, voice low and pleading. “You don’t have to do this.”

“This needs to happen,” Skeppy said. “And I’m the best choice.”

“But—” Bad protested.

“For the last time, Bad,” Skeppy said in playful irritation. Playful because the exaggerated grin remained on his face. “It has to be me. Look behind you and then tell me that you should go.”

White eyes flicked behind a tall dark shoulder and landed on Dream. The shoulder slumped, and Bad nodded.

“Wish me luck,” Skeppy said as he lit the portal. The four watched as he stepped in and waved. Something in Dream’s stomach churned. He grasped Tommy’s hand harder.

“Luck,” Bad said softly. The diamond golem’s mouth near split his face, and his hand waved harder. And then he was gone. They stared for a silent moment before Bad added:

“Please come back safe.”

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Grabbing a cookie absentmindedly, Dream leaned further forward and flipped the page of his book. The picture on the page briefly caught his attention before he forced it on the words on the page in an effort not to learn the fate of Pythias and Damon. He let out a breath as Pythias returned before the executioner’s sword fell on Damon’s neck. He grinned when the king pardoned both men and chortled as the king tried to become the Pythias and Damon’s friend. Too bad for the king, the two chose their friends very wise—

“This is boring!”

Dream’s attention snapped from the book to the teen floating over his head.

“Let’s do something else. Anything else! I can only stare at books so long before my eyes start to hurt.”

“Are you sure it’s not your brain?” Dream muttered. Blue eyes narrowed upside-down at him.

“What’d you say?” Tommy accused.

“Nothing,” Dream said as he closed the book. At least he’d gotten through a whole three myths before Tommy interrupted. Again. Turns out Techno’s taste in books wasn’t terrible. “If you are bored, Tommy, you can literally go anywhere else.”

“Yeah. But I don’t want to,” Tommy said as he floated down and draped himself over Dream’s head. The teen’s pointed chin poked pretty hard into the top of Dream’s skull and nearly knocked the mask off the side of his head. “I’m boooored.”

“You already said that,” Dream sighed, closing his book. He was not going to get anymore reading done today. And his muffin plate was empty anyway.

“There’s nothing to dooooo,” Tommy whined.

“You could have gone with Techno to gather supplies. Or helped Niki with the crops.”

“You could have done that too,” Tommy said, dropping his arms over both of Dream’s shoulders. Dream wondered if the boy looked like a cape half hanging on him and half floating like he was.

“Niki suggested I take the day off,” Dream said. He pushed an elbow back towards the teen cape to push the ghost off. It didn’t work.

“So? She’s not the boss of you.”

“It’s always a good idea to listen to Niki.”

“It is,” the woman herself said as she entered the library. She stared at Dream and over his head. “Tommy, what are you doing.”

“Nothing,” Tommy defended. “I’m bored.”

“Okay,” Niki said bemused. “Would you like to help Techno organize the stuff he just brought into chests downstairs?”

“No way,” Tommy said, slipping off Dream’s head to hide behind him. “There is no way I am getting in the middle of that. The Blade’s scary on a good day, but he’s twice as scary when he’s organizing. He’s all like, ‘Don’t put that there, idiot! The golden apples go with the potions, not the food stuffs! And stop eating them! Those glowberries are for the foxes, what are you doing!?’—He’s insufferable.”

“*He’s* the insufferable one,” Niki said slowly and with widening eyes. “Riiight. Okay then. Why don’t you help Bad? I think he needs a taste-tester. He’s...still making muffins.”

Dream winced.

“Do we need more wheat seeds?” he asked.

“We might,” Niki said with her own wince. She gave a lopsided smile. “Techno found a lot of sugar cane during his trip.”

“We just gonna let the man stress-bake until he f— collapses then?” Tommy asked.

“It makes him feel better,” Dream argued.

“It’s no skin off my back,” Tommy said with shrug large enough that Dream could feel the rise and fall of the teen’s shoulders from where Tommy held Dream’s own. “His muffins are f— delicious.”

“So why don’t you go help him then?” Niki repeated. “He’s less likely to collapse if someone’s watching him.”

“What if I want to stay right where I am?” Tommy said, fingers curling harder into Dream’s favorite hoodie. “Is that a problem?”

“I’ll be frank,” she said. “Yes. I need to talk to Dream about adult things, and that will be infinitely easier without a child present.”

“I am not a child!”

“He isn’t,” Dream defended, earning surprised silence from both people. “Not after everything he’s been through.”

Brown eyes darkened and sagged. With a soft breath, Niki nodded.

“You’re right,” she said. “But I wanted to speak to you alone. It’s...Techno ran into some people.”

Both Dream and the hands gripping his shoulders tensed.

“Who?” Dream demanded.

“That’s why I wanted to talk to you alone,” Niki said. She shot a sad smile over Dream’s shoulder. “For now.”

“Fine,” Tommy spat. “I’ll go bother Ender-boi then.”

“He’s watching Peace,” Dream warned, throwing a hard look over his shoulder. “Don’t distract him to the point of putting Peace in danger.”

“Yeah, I know,” Tommy grumpily agreed. After one last squeeze, Tommy let Dream go and dropped through the floor in the opposite direction of where Ranboo and Peace likely were. He’d worry about that later.

“Who did Techno run into?” Dream ran through the possibilities. Not Sapnap. Techno would have told him about that encounter himself. And Dream’s comm would have beeped with the notification of Sapnap’s likely canon death. Ant might have trekked this way to try to find them, but Ant would be more likely to wait until Dream contacted him instead of the other way around. Unless there was an emergency. And with Sapnap angry enough to grind for withers—

“Dream!”

The Admin almost jumped at the call. Niki let out a short chortle and smiled.

“Why do I have feeling you’re going over the worst case scenarios? Whatever you’re thinking, it’s not that bad.”

Dream gave sheepish grin back, and Niki rolled her eyes. A sigh slipped out her lips.

“Not that I can blame you given our track record,” Niki grumbled. Her smile turned into a grin. “But it really isn’t like that. Not this time...probably. It’s just people who want to visit. As in proper visitors who ask before showing up randomly. It’s...a nice change.”

“Who?” Dream repeated, trying to still his thoughts. He braced for the answer.

“Punz and Tubbo.”

A burst of breath escaped Dream’s lungs. Punz and Tubbo? That was...a strange pair. Not completely out of the blue, Punz had helped Tubbo more than once. But this Punz...he had sided with Dream and Manberg during the war, but other than that, he hadn’t had much to do

with Dream. He wasn't...he wasn't Dream's Punz (~~but then Dream's Punz left Dream in prison so what did it matter.~~) Tubbo though...

"Why did you tell Tommy to leave?" Dream said letting his gaze flick to Niki's patient face. "Shouldn't he be here to discuss his best friend's visit?"

"Tubbo...he definitely *was* Tommy's best friend," Niki admitted, her eyes shifting away from Dream's. "But after everything...At the end of the day, this is your place. I didn't want you to be pressured into...into making a decision for another person's sake. If Tubbo is allowed to visit or not, it should be *your* decision."

"Oh," Dream breathed. He stuck his hands into his hoodie and slumping into it slightly, immensely glad that Bad had managed to rescue it from its former condition. Though it felt almost overwarm at the moment. "Still, Tubbo's Tommy's best friend. If he's come to see Tommy...if he's come to reconcile, we shouldn't stop him."

"Will you be comfortable with him here?" Niki asked plainly.

"He's fine," Dream answered from his partial slouch.

"Did he cause you any pain in...before?"

"No," Dream replied flatly as he straightened and clenched his pocketed hands into fists. The memory of watery cornflower eyes staring up at him from under an axe rose up in his mind. He pushed it back. "No."

"What about Punz?"

"He was the person I trusted the most at the end," Dream confessed. His left shoulder lifted briefly and quickly fell. "But that was...it was after L'Manberg's first destruction."

“First?” Niki asked as her brows pressed together. “At some point, if you feel up to it, you really should give us a timeline of events of what happened before. Because all we have to work with currently is what little you’ve mentioned and what the Egg gave us through Phil, and that’s not painting...the most accurate picture.”

Dream hummed in neither denial nor agreement. He didn’t want to discuss the other timeline. He didn’t—the Egg had wanted him to trust it. It probably didn’t—no, it definitely didn’t tell them what he did. They wouldn’t be here if it had.

“So you’re okay with them showing up?”

“Depends why they want to,” Dream said. “Does Tubbo want to reconcile with Tommy?”

“That’s what it sounds like,” Niki agreed. “Punz wanted to talk to you though.”

“What about?”

“He wouldn’t tell Techno. Though he made it sound Admin-related.”

Dream hummed again. For Punz...for the one he knew, he could hear this one out. But Tubbo...Tubbo’s visit didn’t hinge on him. He reached into his inventory and retrieved his comm. He held it in his hand, his fingers framing the device and hovering over the keys. Inputting commands into the device felt oddly clunky and slow, but he managed to type out a message.

*You whisper to Ranboo: Could you please tell Tommy to come back to the library?*

A moment passed, and he waited for the expected answer. Perhaps the loud teen had actually gone where he’d been told to...? A ding beeped from the plain device.

*Ranboo whispers to You: Isn’t he already there?*



*Ranboo whispers to You: It's only me and Peace in the playroom.*

A half-groan, half-sigh grumbled up Dream's throat. He glanced around before blinking and letting the world become zeros and ones. Near clear red and white code peeked out from behind a bookshelf.

"I can see you, Tommy," Dream called as he crossed his arms.

"He's still here?" Niki exclaimed, but she grew quiet as Dream held up a hand.

"Are you going to come out or are you going to keep hiding like the gremlin you are?"

"The only gremlin here is you," Tommy snipped back as he moved away from the shelf and the semi-transparent code regained its solidity.

"You can go invisible?" Niki asked.

"Of course I f— can. I'm a ghost."

"Tommy, we asked you to leave to have a private conversation," Dream said, a scowl forming on his lips. Tommy scowled back.

"Well I knew you were going to talk about me, so I stayed anyway. Not like me being here or not being here matters or anything. My opinion's not important. I'm not—you know what? Who f— cares? This is *your* place. *Your* little refuge from the world. A world that I apparently need to keep being reminded is yours. None of the rest of us matter. All that matters is that you feel f— safe. That you're happy. That—that you have whatever you f— need. We don't even have to be here. Bet you'd feel better if we were all gone! We should all just leave! Just leave you here to be comfortable in your barrier bubble! Because none of the rest of us f— matter!"

“Tommy—” Niki growled, taking a step forward to stand in between Dream and the shouting ghost, but Dream held her back.

“You,” Dream whispered through a tight throat. He took a deep breath and looked straight into transparent blue eyes that blurred with insubstantial water. He pressed “You...you all matter to me. I wouldn’t—” He forced himself to keep talking, to keep his eyes firmly on the ghost’s. The ghost he’d helped create. The teen he’d hurt almost as badly as he had been hurt. “I don’t want you to leave.” He broke eye contact as a hand slipped into his. Warm brown eyes smiled at him over his shoulder. He smiled back. Taking another breath, he stretched his free hand to the ghost. “Any of you.” The whispered confession nearly became inaudible, but wide blue eyes indicated he’d been heard. “If you don’t want to see Tubbo, he doesn’t have permission to be here. He’s not—” The last word snagged and left him with his hand flapping an invitation in the air.

A transparent hand took his. Clear blue tears dripped down the splotchy see-through face. Refusing to let his mind stutter his action, Dream leaned forward and pressed his forehead against Tommy’s. A snorty, snotty splutter stuttered from the ghost, followed by gasping hissed incomprehensible curses. But the protesting teen didn’t move, and Dream was almost certain the teen pressed back. Smiling, he stared back into red-rimmed blue eyes.

“Do you want to see Tubbo?” Dream asked, trying to anchor the whirlwind of emotions in the swirling blue. The ghost huffed.

“Might as well,” he muttered as he crossed his arms, letting go of Dream’s hand. His head didn’t move. “If he went through all the trouble of talking to Mr. Anti-Social himself to find me. Now getoff!”

Transparent arms pushed Dream away, but the grin didn’t fall off the Admin’s face. The ghost had gained a pinkish-red hue to most of his exposed, translucent skin.

“Then it’s decided,” Dream said. He looked back at Niki who was grinning widely herself. “They can come.”

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Peace squealed as he spread his arms in a vain effort to keep his upwards momentum going. Too soon for the little piglin, he started his fall downwards. Open arms caught him long before the ground could even consider it.

“Again, again!” Peace squealed, and with a smiling huff, Dream threw the child back into the air. The piglin giggled and tried again to fly, but again he fell. Snatching the little piglin out of the air, Dream swung him around, holding the little one up and down in his spinning circles. With one last abrupt motion, he stopped his spinning and knocked their foreheads together, prompting another happy squeal. “Again!”

“You’re going to tire me out, kiddo,” Dream said as he pulled away. Peace squeaked and knocked their heads together hard enough to make Dream wince.

“I can take a turn,” Ranboo offered. “Looks like fun.”

“I’m sure it does,” Dream said. He looked over at the enderman hybrid, an idea forming. “You sure?”

“I am,” Ranboo said firmly. He flickered his eyes across Dream’s face as best as an enderman hybrid could. “You know I won’t drop him.”

“Of course,” Dream said. He pressed Peace’s forehead once more. Squeaking, Peace grabbed the sides of Dream’s face. Chuckling, Dream whispered, “Want to give Ranboo a turn?”

“Boo!” Peace said brightly. He turned his head and squished his cheek against Dream’s forehead to look at the tall teen. “Boo tall! He throw me hard!”

“He will,” Dream agreed. “Better than Papa.”

“No!” Peace protested, tightening his grip on Dream’s face. “Papa best!”

“Of course he is,” Ranboo said as he came closer. “But Papa’s tired. So is it okay if your Ranboo threw you?”

“Okay,” Peace said. He patted Dream’s cheek. “Papa rest. Papa play again? Papa no go away?”

“I won’t,” Dream said. He shuffled the piglin closer and quietly snorted into his ear. The little piglin giggled, and then white eyes widened and sparkled. Peace squeakily grunted back.

“Uh...are you two planning something?” Ranboo said warily.

“Just reassuring him,” Dream said as he passed the little piglin over to Ranboo’s hold. “Remember don’t drop him.”

“I won’t,” Ranboo reassured. Peace gave another giggle which had suspicion leaking into the red and green eyes. Dream considered sending the teen an innocent smile, but Ranboo had gotten enough warning. He sat in the nearby grass and took out a book. Despite the heavy suspicion-laden gaze, Ranboo finally turned and tossed Peace into the air.

The little piglin immediately squealed happily as he went up and down. The enderman hybrid settled into a rhythm and soon swung the little one in circles similar to Dream, except at the end of two or three rotations he tossed the little one back into the air. Tracking the timing of the tosses, Dream waited until a particularly hard toss before slipping his hand into the code and running an overly familiar command. Peace disappeared from sight. A plop and a squeak sounded behind Dream, but a quick hush quieted the sound.

Peering subtly over the book, Dream watched as the teen stumbled over the lack of anything to catch. The enderman hybrid’s head snapped back and forth, panic quickly settling over every inch of his features. After scanning the nearby ground, he stared up at the sky in utter speechlessness as if a small body would fall from it at any moment.



“It wasn’t Peace I was worried about,” Ranboo muttered, his crossed arms tucking up and under his chin. “I thought you were going to kill me.”

“I wouldn’t kill you,” Dream said. He placed Peace in his lap. He then held his hand out palm up. The enderman stared at the hand and curled his tail around his ankle. The hand sagged and nearly folded back around Peace, but Dream held it in place. Words began to tumble out of his mouth. “I didn’t mean—I just thought it’d be funny. Startle you a bit. But I thought you knew—You know I won’t let anything happen to you or Peace? Not while I’m here?”

“You can’t protect us all the time,” Ranboo said. The pout had morphed into a frown. “Bad things happen.”

“I—I know that,” Dream said, looking off to the side. The hand curled and wrapped itself with the other around Peace. “But I said I wouldn’t *let* anything happen. I would try to stop it.”

“Oh,” came a soft realization. There was some shuffling, and then whisper of sound as a lanky body sat next to Dream. Something tufted tickled Dream’s ankle and encircled it. A shoulder knocked into his. “I guess the joke wouldn’t have worked if I had fully remembered that.”

“Remembered?” Dream asked, darting a peek at the enderman’s now sheepish expression.

“All right, so I didn’t fully think it through,” Ranboo admitted. “I must have looked ridiculously stupid.”

“Not stupid,” Dream corrected, hesitantly knocking the teen’s shoulder back. “Just startled and bewildered.”

“Please tell me you didn’t get a picture of that,” Ranboo whined.

“I didn’t,” Dream said. “Though it would have been fun to show Techno and Niki.”

“Not Bad?” Ranboo asked.

“Bad would have gone on for at least half an hour about how I shouldn’t have scared you like that,” Dream said, recalling various times the demon had scolded Dream and—and—But then Skeppy’d come along and get them—him out of it.

“Really?” Ranboo said, his tone causing Dream to glance at the enderman hybrid. Ender’s grin stretched under Ranboo’s red and green gaze. The enderman stood, and his tail slipped its grip from Dream’s ankle. “I think I should go talk to Bad right now.”

“What?” Dream gaped. The enderman hybrid flashed that devious grin at the Admin one more time before running in the direction of the house. Dream sputtered a half-formed protest before quickly standing. “Boo! Get back here!”

“Make me!” the enderman hybrid called back over his shoulder. Looks like Ranboo was going to learn the hard way why Dream was remembered first by most people as a speedrunner before anything else. He adjusted Peace onto his back and grunted a “hang on” before taking off at a full sprint. The lanky teen made the mistake of looking back, causing the enderman hybrid to stumble as he registered Dream’s speed. Dream grinned and whipped out his favorite underrated weapon: a fishing rod.

Ranboo yelped and tried to pick up the pace, but the attempt was far too late. A hook soared through the air and latched onto the impeccable suit jacket. Ranboo slipped and fell flat. Rushing forward, Dream crouched beside the teen and checked him over. Besides the enderman hybrid spitting out grass and dirt, he was fine.

“And where did you think you were going?” Dream said. Peace squeaked his concern over Dream’s shoulder.

“I’m starting to wonder how the hunters won any of your manhunts,” Ranboo said, propping his head on a hand to glare in Dream’s general direction. “How did you catch me while carrying a passenger?”

“Skill,” Dream said tonelessly, earning a smile and an eye roll.

“Any way you can teach me to do that?”

“If you promise not to say anything to Bad, I can try,” said Dream.

“And what are we not saying to me exactly?” asked a voice from above them. Dream looked up to see narrowed white eyes surveying them. “Before you ask, I saw you two muffins from the kitchen window, so I thought I’d come check that both of you were okay.”

“Oh, we’re fine,” Ranboo insisted. “Dream was just going to show me some of his manhunt moves.”

“In exchange for keeping something from me. I heard,” Bad said without the usual bounce to his tone. “So what is so horrible that you feel the need to hide it from me?”

“Nothing,” Ranboo and Dream said in tandem. Dream winced, Bad’s flat expression bringing back memories of past infractions and disappointed, exasperated words.

“Uh-huh. So are you going to confess willingly, or am I going to have to take extreme measures?”

Dream watched out of the corner of his eyes as Ranboo tense. He was going to crack.

“Boo threw Peace and Papa made Peace disappear behind back!” Peace said eagerly over Dream’s shoulder. Dream cringed as baffled white eyes focused on the child over Dream’s shoulder.

“You threw Peace?!” Bad exclaimed as he turned fully on Ranboo.



“Up in the air!” Ranboo explained quickly. “Like—like you do with kids! You know, throw them up and then catch them before they fall. You know, like this.” The enderman pantomimed throwing something in the air and then catching it several times at three times the speed necessary. Seeing as Bad’s expression grew harder, Ranboo jammed a finger in Dream’s direction. “He’s the one who teleported him away mid-throw!”

Bad’s disapproving gaze fell on Dream, and Dream took a hesitant half-step back.

“As you can see, Peace is fine,” Dream said, pushing the child up so he would be more visible over Dream’s shoulder. “Everyone is fine.”

“Fine! I nearly had a heart attack! How is that fine!” Ranboo protested. Dream winced.

“How many times have I told you: jokes are only funny if everyone is laughing,” Bad said in his disappointed voice. Dream instinctively felt his body sag. “Giving people heart attacks isn’t funny. I swear people are going to think that Skeppy’s the one who half-raised...”

Bad’s voice faded. The demon’s tail drooped to the floor even as he tried to recover his smile.

“Just be careful, muffinheads,” Bad said.

“We will,” Dream said, the reassurance bursting out his mouth. “Were you making muffins?”

“Muffinds?” Peace squeaked.

“Muffinds,” Bad repeated, his smile widening. “Why yes. I was indeed making ‘muffinds.’ Want some?”

“How many can we have?” Ranboo asked eagerly.

“I’ve made a lot, so I’d say as many as you like, but I’m worried that you’re going to make yourselves sick if I say that,” Bad said.

“Muffinds!” Peace squealed, scrambling over Dream’s shoulder as if to throw himself at Bad. Rolling his eyes, Dream grabbed the back of Peace’s green shirt and tugged the child forward and over his shoulder.

“Hey! Be careful,” Bad said as he reached out. Dream plopped the little piglin in Bad’s arms. Squealing, Peace leapt and scrambled to knock his forehead against Bad’s. Scrambling to keep Peace from falling, Bad nearly fell over but managed to regain his balance and pin the little piglin into a seated position onto his shoulder with one hand. He huffed and carefully knocked the side of his forehead and horn against Peace’s. “You’re a handful, aren’t you? Just like your Papa, huh?”

“Peace like Papa?” the little piglin said, grabbing Bad’s horn to steady himself as he peered into Bad’s face.

“Oh, for sure,” Bad said, brushing his claws along the little piglin’s side. Peace squealed and squeaked as he chortled giggles. “He was just as adorable when he was this little.”

“You didn’t know me when I was that young,” Dream said.

“That why I said ‘little’ and not young,” said Bad as he caught Peace when the little piglin lost his balance while laughing. He settled him safely against his chest. “You’ve always been a bit small for your age.”

“That’s not true,” Dream said, ignoring the heat crawling up his neck.

“You’re ridiculously short,” said a voice behind Dream, and a weight pressed onto his head. He looked up to glower at the piglin hybrid now using his head as an armrest.

“Not all of us have brute genes,” Dream countered as he slipped under the bulky arm and kicked at the large hybrid’s ankle enough to cause the man to stagger forward.

“Now that they mention it,” Ranboo said in soft wonder as he looked Dream up and down. He held up his black arm and whizzed it over Dream’s head. “You...you really are short?”

“Took you this long to notice?” Techno huffed.

“It’s...he doesn’t seem like the short type? I guess?”

“I am a fine height for a human,” Dream said firmly. “You are the freakishly tall hybrids.”

“Really? Name one person on this server shorter than you,” Techno challenged. Dream squared his shoulders and resisted the urge to build up to tower over the piglin hybrid.

“What’s going on here?” Niki said, walking up a step short from getting between Techno and Dream.

“Did you realize Dream is short?” Ranboo asked with that awe in his voice.

“...this is about Dream being short?”

Dream stared at Niki, who sheepishly shrugged.

“I mean, you are? A little? You’re about my height.”

“So you’re saying you’re short,” Dream said flatly.

“Yep. And I have no qualms about it,” said Niki. Brown eyes gained a sparkling glint. “Do you?”

Dream shook his head. “It suits me fine. Makes it easier to run laps around tall idiots.”

“Hey!” Bad cried.

“Wasn’t talking about you, Bad,” Dream said.

“Oh. That’s fine then,” Bad said with an affirming nod. Peace looked up at the demon and then nodded along.

“Does that mean you were talking about me?” Ranboo asked. Dream looked straight at the enderman hybrid and grinned. The tall teen blinked and then hissed, “ $\overline{\Phi} \circ \Psi \circ \Delta \text{ i } \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \text{i} \}$ .”

“ $\sigma_{\square\square} \Omega_{\square\square}\Omega_{\Psi}$ ,” Dream warbled.

“If I were your height, I’d likely say something like that too,” said Techno. “Imagine having to come up with excuses to like your height. Couldn’t be me.”

“Are you saying that there’s something wrong with being short?” Niki said. Her arms crossed under a sharp grin, the hoe she had been using on the nearby fields caught a spark of light and glinted. Techno clapped his hands suddenly.

“That reminds me of what I came over here for,” Techno said hurriedly. “The ‘guests’ are asking if they can enter.”

“They’re here?” Dream said, his hand flying to his mask.

“They’re on the other side of the nether portal,” Techno answered. “We might have to move it after their ‘visit.’”

“How did they find it?”

“Easy. I lead them to it. Better than bringing them to the barrier. Unless you want the whole server knowing about how that works?”

“Okay,” Dream said in a breath. “Let’s let them in. Ender can you go find Tommy. He said something about preparing his room.”

“ $\exists \varphi \subseteq \lambda' \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \psi \Delta U \Delta \exists \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \psi \Omega \times \psi \overline{\Phi} \exists \lambda,$ ” Ender hissed.

“Fine. Have Ranboo do it,” Dream said. The enderman hybrid nodded over crossed arms before blinking and slouching slightly. “Is that okay with you, Ranboo?”

"I'll get him," Ranboo said with a nervous smile. He vanished in purple particles.

“Bad, do you want to set out muffins for them?”

“Sure! Do you think they’d like milk to go with them?” Bad asked. He lifted Peace up and tucked him under his chin. “And which ones do you think they’d like? I haven’t spent a lot of time with either sooo—”

“Milk would be a good idea. One of your spice-filled recipes would be good for Punz,” Dream said. “Tubbo liked sweet things. Do you have any honey muffins?”

“Well I did find some honey stored away in the barn’s chests,” Bad admitted. “And I might have used some of it to make a new honey-based recipe at Tommy’s request.”

“Offer Tubbo some of those then,” Dream suggested.

“Help with Muffinds?” Peace squeaked. Dream nodded, his lips twisting back upwards.

“Yay! I get the best helper ever!” Bad said as he held the little piglin up face to face. Peace giggled and bonked Bad’s forehead again. Bad bonked back and then placed the child on the floor. He leaned sideways to hold the little one’s hand. “Let’s hurry and set out the best muffin snack ever!”

“Best muffinds!” Peace agreed. He dragged Bad towards the house.

“Niki, do you want to talk to Tubbo or Punz?” Dream asked, smirking at the tall demon getting tugged forward by a small child.

“No. Not necessarily,” Niki replied. “And if I did, I can always find them later.”

“Would you mind taking Peace to his playroom once he’s helped Bad and telling him to stay there?” Dream said.

“Of course not. Is Ranboo coming too?”

Dream shook his head.

“Wow. You really don’t think they’re threats,” Techno said.

“They are threats,” Dream argued. “But they...they came here to talk. So we’re going to give them the opportunity to talk.”

“With Ranboo?”

“He’s not a child,” Dream said. “No more than Tommy is. No more than Tubbo is. They could...It would be good if they got along.”

“Is this about what the Egg said through Phil?” Niki asked. “About how Tubbo and Ranboo were raising Peace in the other timeline?”

“Maybe,” Dream said, his fingers digging into the edges of his mask as it remained on the side of his head. “They...we’ll keep a close eye on them.”

“The undone omelet’s gone,” Techno said. “So it won’t be any trouble for us to take them out if necessary.”

“Hopefully it doesn’t come to that,” Niki sighed.

“It shouldn’t,” Dream reassured. He moved the mask over his face. “But it doesn’t hurt to be prepared.”

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Fingers dug into Dream’s upper arm, and Dream placed his hand over the quivering ones.

The portal swirled and fluxed visually and audibly, and three people stepped into the basement. Techno kept striding forward to turn and stand next to Niki, or rather slightly in front of her and Dream. Nails scratched under the edges of Dream’s arm, and Dream dropped his hand and straightened as the remaining two turned their attention to him and the ghost floating at his side.

“...Tommy?” the shorter said. He brushed strawberry blond bangs aside from blue eyes and kept staring as the strands slipped through trembling fingers. “Is that...are you really...?”

“Really what?” Tommy barked, his grip tightening and threatening to warp the netherite under it. “Alive? I dunno. What do you think?” One hand released and flapped in the air demonstrating its transparency. “Same as last time. Don’t worry. I left to haunt someone else.”

“You’re here? You’re really here,” Tubbo said, a smile breaking out under the hair-curtained eyes. He lunged forward and threw himself at Tommy. Doing a quick half-turn, Dream caught the lunging teen before he hit the wall. Tommy winced and floated upwards to keep from having his former best friend in the bottom half of his insubstantial torso. Hidden cornflower eyes stared up at Dream and then switched to the rising Tommy. He gave out a soft, hurt “Tommy?”

“Nothing personal, Tubs,” Tommy said in quiet gruff murmur. “Ghost remember? Dream’s solid, but other than that, everyone else just...goes through me.”

“What?” Tubbo said, shaking off Dream’s hold. “That’s not how it’s supposed to work. Ghostbur’s not like that.”

“Admin stuff, if I had to guess. He’s also the one who put me back together again, so there’s that,” Tommy answered as he turned himself upside-down. Dream turned his attention away from the two reconciling teens to the remaining figure by the portal.

Punz stood watching them silently on the block just outside the portal. Grey eyes scanned the people in the room, and Dream could almost feel Techno tensing under the silent scrutiny.

“We have muffins. All-spice and honey. Would you like some?” Niki said, her hands lifting in a vague, abrupt gesture. Punz focused on her for a moment and nodded.

“Sounds good,” Punz said levelly, all emotions out of his voice. He was all business (as expected).

“Did she say honey?” Tubbo asked, hope bleeding into his voice.



“Yeah, she did. Bad-made honey muffins,” Tommy said with a whiff of pride. Niki turned to head towards the stairs, pulling Techno behind her. Blood red eyes only looked away briefly from the figure by the portal.

“Bad-made?” Tubbo asked. His voice grew blank.

“Yeah. Bad-made. As in made by the f— muffin master himself, Badboyhalo!” Tommy said. Dream watched as Punz took a sudden step forward.

“And you eat them?” Tubbo asked in a whispering gasp. Dream’s full attention jerked towards the shorter teen. He subtly reached for an unnamed netherite ax in his inventory. Punz sped past Dream and grabbed Tubbo’s shoulder.

“It would be an honor to eat muffins made by the muffin master,” Punz said too quickly. Transparent blue eyes scanned the two and huffed.

“Shoulda figured you’d be like that,” Tommy muttered floating to catch up with Niki and Techno standing halfway up the stairs. Dream looked up at them, and they stared down at him. He shook his head. Niki nodded and resumed pulling Techno up the stairs. Techno grunted, and Dream let out a small snort and briefly lifted an empty hand.

“I didn’t mean like that,” Tubbo said stumbling after Tommy. “Tommy!”

“Are you going to close the portal?” Punz asked, pulling Dream’s attention from the two teens. Dream brushed past the hooded figure, flinching slightly at the accidental contact. He took out a diamond pickaxe and mined one of the blocks, keeping an eye on the mercenary still standing at the bottom of the stairs. Shoving the obsidian into his inventory, he turned to face the too quiet mercenary.

“...what do you want?” Dream asked, the words finding resistance in his throat in a way he hadn’t expected. He didn’t clear his throat. This was not his Punz.

“Straight to the point,” Punz said, the sleeves of his hoodie falling briefly over clenched hands in a near-missable motion. The mercenary was nervous. “What would it take to let you keep Tubbo here?”

“...why?”

“Sapnap’s been this way?”

Dream nodded.

“He’s brewing trouble back on the Greater SMP.”

“...what kind?”

“He’s riling people up. The other day he nearly caused El Rapids to go to war with Kinoko,” Punz said. He paused. “How aware are you of the goings-on in the Greater SMP area?”

“Somewhat,” Dream said, pulling out a book from his inventory. He handed it over to Punz. “Give me an updated version of borders and relations between groups.”

“How detailed?” Punz said taking the book. Right. Not his Punz.

“As detailed as possible,” Dream clarified. “Emphasis on those who are remain upset about the Egg’s actions.”

“And who blame a certain demon for its spread?”

A smile faintly echoed the one on his mask. “Yes.”

“In exchange, Tubbo remains here?”

“As long as he wants,” Dream confirmed. “And once you’ve returned with the full report, you can stay here as well.”

“I appreciate the offer,” Punz said. “But having the kid here will suffice. I have things I want to keep an eye on in the mainland.”

Humming in loose agreement, Dream moved towards the stairs. “Will you be staying for muffins?”

“I intend to return to the mainland with an inventory full,” Punz said. Dream stopped mid-step and turned.

“I have one more question,” Dream said. Punz paused on the bottom step. “Have you seen Skeppy?”

“No,” the mercenary answered, sleeves over his hands briefly. “I had heard he’d made it back to the Greater SMP.”

“Make sure to add his status to the book,” Dream said. He leapt over the railing and back onto the basement floor. Grey eyes zoomed in on his movement. He held out the obsidian block from earlier. “I forgot to put this back in its chest.”

The grey eyes followed him as he deposited the obsidian in the chest. Once the chest closed, Dream stretched a hand to loosely point at the stairs. Punz did not look away from him.

“We’d better hurry before Tommy eats all the muffins,” Dream said. He gripped the railing from before and hung loosely on it. “After you.”

Narrowing grey eyes pierced Dream's mask, and Dream tilted it. The mercenary walked up the stairs. Dream jumped the railing and continued up behind the mercenary. Punz jerkily stopped at the top, and Dream peered around him. A large piglin hybrid leaned silently on the wall opposite the basement door.

"What took you two so long? Did you lose your diamond pickax, Dream?"

"We had a chat," Dream said. He hummed and then quietly snorted. Techno grunted back.

"Catching a cold are we?"

"That wasn't a sneeze," Dream said flatly.

"And what am I supposed to believe is was?"

"I remembered what Tommy did yesterday," Dream said with a hint of amusement. Punz looked between them and decided to slip towards the kitchen. Once he had entered it, Techno grunted again. Dream sighed and grunted lightly back.

"Are you two coming?" Niki called from the kitchen. Dream strode past the piglin hybrid and into the kitchen. Techno followed. The woman whispered almost soundlessly as Dream passed, "Is everything all right?"

When Tubbo shoved a glazed muffin into the mercenary's face, Dream shook his head.

Chapter End Notes

Ender translation:

𐌲𐌿𐌱𐌰 𐌳𐌹𐌸𐌰? – You done?

$\mathbb{H} \circ \Pi \circ \circ \Lambda \circ \Delta \mathbb{H} \circ \Pi \Lambda \Psi \Delta \times \mathbb{U} \mathbb{H} \delta \Delta \otimes \Psi \mathfrak{H} \mathbb{H} \circ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Psi \times \{ \Psi \mathbb{U} \mathcal{J} \Delta \sqsubseteq \Psi \Delta \times \overline{\Phi}$   
 $\Delta \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \Delta \Omega \circ ?$  – You know you nearly gave my other self a heart attack?

{Q - Sorry

I thought it would be funny.

i⌋⌋ ΔΔ } . – It was.

⊢ ⊃ Π'↗ψ ⊥ ⊃ Φ ⊆ ♠ ψ ⊴ λ. – You're both mean.

I have nothing to do with this.

$\sigma_{\Omega\Omega\Omega\Omega} \Omega\Omega\Omega\Omega\Omega\Omega$  - Good choice

∫ ∓ ∅ ∙ ∆ ' ∅ ∓ ∓ ∪ ∆ ∫ ∅ ∓ ∅ ∓ ∅ ∓ ∅ ∓ ∅ ∫ ∅ ∓ - I don't deal with the cretin

# Plots and Plotting

## Chapter Summary

Dream follows Punz to find out what the mercenary's motives are. He succeeds.

## Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the lateness of this chapter. It also has so little editing because it's been fighting me for months. Either I post or it will continue to be stuck in the limbo which is the WIP pile. I will edit this chap as soon as possible. Hopefully this isn't as bad as I think it is.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream stepped silently behind Techno as the piglin hybrid stepped into the purple swirling portal. Punz disappeared from the center of the portal before the purple swirls surrounded Dream and Techno thickly and then faded to reveal the odd red of netherrack. They stepped out of the portal as one, though Dream stayed near the portal. The odd smoking spirals would mask his own potion effects.

“And this is where we part ways or some other dramatic nonsense. If you need to visit again, you know what to do,” Techno huffed. He gave a deliberate snort, and Dream huffed a quiet squeal that could barely be heard over the portal’s ambient noise. Techno dared an amused smirk.

“I do. Let Dream know that I will leave the information at these coordinates.”

“Fine. But don’t expect the portal to be here when you come back.”

“I expected as much,” Punz said with an understanding smirk that had Dream stiffening. Punz didn’t do unnecessary niceties. Techno chuffed and stepped back into the portal. The large warrior’s domineering presence disappeared, and Punz’s smirk dropped. A moment of

trepidation scrawled over the mercenary's face before determination settled onto it. He started to dig himself out of the hidden netherrack cavern.

Taking advantage of the distraction caused by Punz's mining, Dream downed another invis potion and then shadowed the mercenary's movements. Punz soon reached the surface of the third level of the Nether and headed west. Given their current coordinates, that lead to one area alone. They soon came up to a crisscrossed area of bridges leading to various portals. Dream halted briefly to take in any changes. The bridges had multiple gaps where new blocks connected old, and someone had decorated the passageways with color-coded concrete blocks every color but red. Some of the paths were even carpeted various colors to cover the reddish netherrack.

Punz strode up an orange-lined passageway, and Dream dipped into the code quickly to mute his own sound so the mercenary wouldn't hear his sprint as Dream hurried to catch up. Punz stepped into one of the portals, and the swirling purple glowed and wailed its eerie woops, completely engulfing the blond mercenary in purple. And then he was gone. Dream followed.

The grass swayed in the wind on the other side, framing a path that Punz was several dozen blocks down. Taking another invis potion, Dream trotted and quickly overtook the mercenary who strode ever purposefully forward.

"Punz!" called a familiar voice that froze Dream. Sapnap rushed over from where he had been leaning on a birch fence. "You made it back!"

"Were you expecting me not to?" Punz snarked with an amused smirk. That smirk...Dream's breath stuck in his throat. Please no. "Tubbo is in place."

"So they let him stay? Wow. I didn't think that would work," Sapnap said almost to himself. He scoffed. "How'd that get past the Technoblade?"

"If anyone was suspicious, it was Dream," Punz said. Dream grabbed the inside of his cloak to steady his shaking hands, but he didn't move. He didn't know if he could have.

“That’s because they have him brainwashed,” Sapnap snapped, fire in every word. The shock caused the shaking to stop.

“He didn’t appear brainwashed,” Punz hummed.

“Then you explain why he suddenly told me and George that he hated us and then disappeared of the face off the server,” Sapnap growled.

“We’ve been over this, Sap,” Punz said softly. A tone that soothed and then pierced because it wasn’t for Dream. “He could have been influenced by the Egg then, but then why would he have destroyed it?”

“He fought it off,” Sapnap said. “If anyone could have, it was him.”

“Then why did he run off again?”

“Because Ba—the Egg-lover got to him!” Sapnap yelled. Fire ringed his fingers. “*He* touched him afterwards, remember? *He* transferred whatever virus the Egg brought onto Dream! That’s why he’s so paranoid about everyone except *them*.”

Punz sighed. “Are you sure?”

“Of course!” Sapnap yelled, the licks of flame flashing but carefully not lashing out at Punz. “I know my best friend! Dream ran! He ran away from me! Not for fun, but because he was terrified! He’s never—Dream isn’t scared of anything! Let alone me! We’ve been best friends since we were like five. He’d never treat me like he did after the withers. Like he was the f\*\*\*\* Admin and I was some rando player he has to try to keep in line. There’s no way that there’s nothing wrong with his head.”

“He was gone a long time,” Punz pointed out.



“He could never be gone that long,” Sapnap said, the flames flickering and fading. Everything in Sapnap sagged. “He—We’re the Dream Team. He wouldn’t forget that unless someone made him to.”

“From what I saw, the group works as a unit. They appear to have methods of communication that no one else can pick up on without intense study,” Punz reported dispassionately, steady and settling. Sapnap’s attention focused on the mercenary with fixed intent. “They do not take slights against any member slightly. Tubbo nearly got us kicked out when he questioned trusting the Egg-lover. He is a vital part of their group.”

“Of course he is,” Sapnap snarled. Dream’s fingers twitched towards his inventory, but he stilled them. “And *Technoblade*?”

“He was almost constantly by Dream’s side while I was there. He was the one tasked with escorting me out. He’s also likely already moved the portal.”

“He gave the Egg the most trouble,” Sapnap scowled. “But look at him now, one of the Egg-lover’s dogs.”

Dream’s hand was over his axe, but he pulled his hand back out, determined not to give away his presence.

“Niki also stuck close to Dream as well, but she also kept leaving as if to check on something,” Punz continued. “Ranboo flittered between Dream and where Tommy and Tubbo were hanging out. My guess is he wanted to spend time with the boys his age, but he felt Dream’s nerves and didn’t want to leave him alone. The Egg-lover mostly stayed out of the way and made muffins. I didn’t see Skeppy.”

“Don’t worry about Skeppy. We’ve got that covered.”

Punz’s eyebrows rose, and Dream’s stomach dropped.

“He was sent as some sort of ambassador. Guess Ba—the Egg-lover himself would have been too obvious. Puffy is keeping an eye on him.”

“Oh? What has he been saying?”

“Dumb stuff about how Dream completely got rid of it the Egg. How I have to approach the situation with caution or I’ll lose my only chance, yadda yadda. You know, complete lies.”

“I see,” Punz hummed. Dream felt the potion’s effects lightening. He had to take another and leave. He only had two more. He paused an extra second when Punz continued, “I could add the fact that you’ve captured Skeppy to the info I was going to leave for Dream. It has to be accurate or else he will grow even more suspicious.”

“That’s fine. Let the Egg-lover know we have his ‘*best friend*’ under close watch. Maybe he’ll even come out of his hidey hole and try to save him. Wouldn’t look good if he just let his so-called best friend remain under *enemy* control.”

“Where are you keeping him?” asked Punz, and Dream held his breath.

“Don’t worry. He’s in a safe location. Do you remember the prison that the Egg had you guys working on?”

“The one Sam and I worked on?”

“Yeah that on~~shhrrkkkk~~”

The static that came from Punz’s mouth hissed and crackled along with the growing static in Dream’s ears. The two kept talking and began to move away. Dream barely registered their movement and only absentmindedly chugged a tasteless liquid when their backs were turned. He stumbled and fell, landing on his hands. Black crowded his vision, and his breaths came out more and more uneven.

His head shoved itself into his knees, and he kept breathing. The hard, smooth surface of his mask made that task of breathing difficult. Every gasp for air grew louder and shriller than the last. He wanted to pull his head up and glance around. Make sure the two weren't coming back (his breathing was so loud he couldn't hear them—could they hear him?). But his everything refused to move.

(He wanted to go home. He wanted Peace and Ranboo and Niki and Techno and Ba—)

Dream clamped his gaping mouth shut and held his breath, shocking his brain into gear. He had to get back to the others. He had to warn them that their suspicions were right. To keep an eye on Tubbo. That Skeppy was—

Everything locked up again.

“Dream?” came a quiet voice, and Dream's head shot up. (Why couldn't it have shot up earlier?) Whiskers trembled over dark brown fur, and a black nose twitched under turquoise eyes. “What are you doing here?”

“Ant?” Dream whispered hoarsely. Turquoise eyes blinked, and then the furred head nodded. It came closer.

“Are you okay?” Ant whispered, his twitching nose sniffing the air around Dream pointedly. Dream shrugged, not wanting to try and squeeze another word from his throat. “Look. You can't stay here. I mean, you could but—They took Skeppy and locked him up the moment he set foot in here. Everyone's suspicious of anyone that had strong ties with the Egg. There's even a theory going around that you didn't destroy the Egg, but that it's taking over you to rule over the server in a different way. Even those who think that's impossible want to—I don't know, keep you here under close watch in case. You need to get back to your bubble base and stay there until everyone calms down.”

Dream's breaths struggled to squeeze up and down his throat. Why was this happening? Shouldn't everyone be fine? The Egg was gone. Why are they locking people up?

(How long had it been since his server knew peace? Would it ever again?)

Nodding to show he understood, Dream pried his arms out from around his legs and straightened them in order to push himself upright. As he balanced on shaky legs, an odd glint of light caught his attention. The reflected sunshine bounced off something hidden in the tan fur of Ant's neck. His fingers wrapped around it and steadied it for a good look. It appeared to be a simple redstone locator hanging like a tag from a clasp (a collar) around Ant's throat. His mask tilted up at Ant's face. The turquoise eyes slid away from Dream's masked gaze.

"It's only a tracker," Ant whispered. "It's to make sure I don't go too far from Kinoko. Kinda like Phil's tracker back in New L'Manberg. Though now that I think about it, I don't know if Techno or the others ever told you about that."

The hard edges of the tag dug into the skin of Dream's fingers, but Dream managed a short nod.

"Okay, so they did tell you. So you get that it's—it's a failsafe. To make sure I don't—you know, fall to the Egg again. Or any virus like it for that matter. If people know where I am, I can't get infected." The turquoise eyes flittered this way and that away from Dream, and the dark brown tipped tail flicked back and forth. Dream let go of the tag before the indents on his fingers dug deep enough to bleed. The flittering turquoise stare finally settled back on Dream. "It's fine. Really. I know I have to earn their trust back. You need to keep Bad and the rest of your group away from here though. I don't think any of you would do well limited to a certain area. Maybe Bad, but I don't think he'd...be given that choice."

"...you can't stay here," Dream whispered.

"Don't worry about me," the cat hybrid said with a quirky, curvy grin. But his eyes started to flicker around again. "I can take care of myself. It could be so much worse for me. Get Skeppy out, but leave me out of it. As in we never had this talk. Okay?"

Dream's head started to shake, but the Admin stopped it. He blinked, and tan and brown code raced in rows in front of him. Not a speck of red hummed in the equation, but a tiny, dusty red-outlined grey code clamped around a tight section of brown. Dream closed his eyes and nodded. A soft sigh huffed from the direction of the tracked code.

“Thank you, Dream,” Ant whispered in barely a hiss. “It’s more than I could have asked you for.”

Masked green eyes opened to see the cat hybrid bounding off in the direction blurred memories (were they from today?) indicated the mercenary and blaze hybrid went. Every part of Dream ached (especially his head and heart) so he slipped a hand into the code and inputted the all-to-used command.

A second later he stood next to his green bed. Daylight streamed through the windows and glinted on the unlit lanterns. He watched the light bounce on the metal mesmerized, focusing on the sight instead of the memory of a glinting trap around a former close friend’s neck. He knew what he should do. He should exit the room and find Techno and Niki. Tell them that Punz was working with Sapnap. That Tubbo was likely a spy. (Oh, he’d have to break that to Tommy too.) And then he’d have to tell Bad about Sk—

His knees buckled, and he fell backwards on the bed. He should get up. He should move. He had to tell them—didn’t he? He flipped onto his side and curled up, but warmth was missing from his arms. Peace was still hidden in his playroom downstairs. Tubbo might stumble onto him otherwise.

He curled further into himself, and his mask knocked against his knees again. He yanked it off in hopes of keeping his breaths even. His attempt failed as his lungs squeezed. Why? He didn’t—he didn’t want to—

Enough. He slammed his mask back onto his face. Things had to be done. Curling up and whining was going to do nothing. Dream pushed off the bed and stood. He stood in the middle of the room and ignored his shaking limbs. A book. Books made sense. They helped everything make sense (even when there wasn’t anything worth making sense for). He could do this himself.

He pulled a blank book and let it flip open in his hand. The blank pages stretched, and he put his hand on the lines. Runes appeared over the yellowed papers. Names, places, their relations to each other. A basic index. Dream soon pulled another book and named it Sapnap and shifted the code so the color was blue. Skills, history, and motives were inscribed in

runes. He pulled another and labeled it Ant as the cover glowed into a soft yellow. The same information scribbled across the pages in the near indecipherable text.

Another book. Another title. He had to hurry. He had to finish. He had to put these in place. He had to finish his contingencies and get back to...back to...what? His hand dropped, and the blue book hung in his loose grip. What was he doing?

The pile of books covered the shelves in front of him. Names printed on the top two yellow books: Technoblade and Ranboo. The half-finished blue book in Dream's hand slipped and thumped onto the floor. He jerked at the noise and looked down. The name Tommy scrawled along the cover. He snatched it up and slammed at the code. The book glowed yellow. He gently placed it on top of Technoblade's. He then knocked all the books onto the floor.

Biting the inside of his cheek, he returned to the bed. The air was sticking to the sides of his throat again. He sat on the green covers and stared at the glinting, reflective lanterns. Metal reflecting the sunlight like—

A groan hiccupped out of his sore esophagus. He pulled his comm out and started typing. He stopped. Started. Threw the device against the wall. The clank was louder than the thump, but he crossed his arms and scowled behind the mask. It was still hard to breathe. No. It was harder. Maybe he should stop.

“Dream? Is that you?”

Dream's breathing did freeze to a stop. The door peeked open, and a white-eyed figure poked in.

“Oh. You're back. What happe...ned...” The words faded as the demon likely took in the state of the room. Dream wasn't sure. He wasn't breathing, and darkness faded the edges of his vision. “Everything...okay?”

Just nod your head. He will back off and leave. You'll be able to breath. You need to *breath*. You can't stop. Not in front of him. Not in front of any of them.

“Dream?” the words repeated. Nod! Nod, idiot! Dream’s head fell forward, but it didn’t come back up. The rest of him fell forward into spreading darkness. “Dream!”

Robust, cool arms caught him, and the jolt shoved a gasp into his lungs. Pain laced through his muscles even as the gasp repeated. Words muttered in his direction, and a hand spread onto his back. It pushed gently and then drew back. The gasps followed the push-and-back pattern. Soon the world faded back into focus.

“...out. In. Out. There we go,” Bad said softly. Gently. Every tone more and more comforting. “In. Out. In. Out. You’re doing great. In. Ou—”

“...Bad?”

“Dream! You’re back! Are you okay?” Bad burst out. “You scared me you muffin! What happened?!”

Saliva squeezed down his more open throat, and he opened his mouth. But as he feared, nothing came out. He had managed a word, but now what could he say? The truth was too much but he couldn’t...Bad wouldn’t believe a lie.

“Dream,” Bad said again, his name earning a quiver this time. “Is everything—Did Punz do something to you? Or was it—Did Sappy find you? Or—or Skeppy?”

Dream stiffened, and immediately cursed himself inwardly. Bad’s trembling line of a mouth gaped into a small ‘o’ and then turned full downward.

“They have Skeppy, don’t they,” Bad said so flatly he almost resembled a certain piglin hybrid. Dream hesitated but nodded. He was too far gone to lie to Bad. “Of course the overconfident muffin got caught.” The words would have sounded flippant if they hadn’t trembled. “I’m sure we can figure some way to get him back.”

Dream didn't respond. Bad sat on the bed next to Dream (when did he get back onto the bed?). A thin, sturdy limb encircled Dream's lower back. Automatically, Dream leaned into Bad's side. Bad hummed softly, a tune Dream had forgotten he remembered.

The soft humming filled the air, and Dream's head grew fuzzy and lax.

"...I don't want to go back," Dream let slip. The humming stopped, and Dream bit both inward cheeks.

"That's okay," Bad said. Dream's mouth sagged open, but Bad continued. "I don't want to go back either. I like it here. With Techno and Niki and Ranboo and Tommy and Ender and Peace and *you*." A rough, cool cheek squished against the top of his head. "I don't ever want to leave."

"...you would have gone instead of Skeppy."

"I would have," Bad admitted. "Because I want Sappy to have what we have here. I want everyone on the server to know this. To know what peace feels like again. I think we've all known conflict and turmoil long enough."

"...so the answer is to join in more conflict and turmoil?"

"I don't think we're going to get out of it, so we should get it out of the way then. No other way but through this one."

"I think we could stay out of it," Dream said firmly. "We could stay here and let them burn down the rest of the server and stay here. Safe."

"Sounds to me like you already tried that," Bad chuckled, the sound rumbling through Dream's side. "Isn't that what you tried with the Egg? How long did that work?"



“...long enough,” Dream cracked.

“Long enough for Techno and the others to find you and ask you for help. And you helped them with barely any reason to. Why do you think you did that, Dream?”

Dream’s lips pushed against each other into a hidden pout. He refused to answer that.

“How long do you think it will be before someone else asks or needs help and you’ll do the same thing over again? Because if I had to guess, I would say it’s headed there already. Why else would you let Skeppy come here? Or Tubbo?”

“Tubbo’s here as a spy,” Dream said tonelessly, pushing back the image of glittering metal over tan fur. “He’s likely a plant too. Whenever they figure out a plan, Tubbo will be central to it.”

“That would explain why he was extra careful around me,” Bad said. “He’s likely worried about the Egg and wants to know how to get rid of me.”

“I won’t let him,” Dream hissed. Bad grinned.

“I know you won’t. Just like I know you won’t let them keep Skeppy.”

Dream’s whole body sagged.

“...I would free him because you asked me to.”

Bad’s grin fell, and he shook his head.

“I won’t ask,” Bad said softly. “If you don’t want to leave, then don’t. Stay here. I’ll get the hardheaded muffin myself.”

“No,” Dream said lowly. His head shook (as did his hands). “He’s being kept in P—” His throat closed too tight. He could barely breathe. Hands folded his face between them. Cool roughness pressed against his forehead, and he pressed back. The breath flowed easier into his lungs.

“Sshh,” Bad shushed. He was taking loud, obvious breaths. “Breathe with me. That’s it. In. Out. In. Out.”

Dream’s breath matched the exaggerated ones, and the world felt less constricting. He pulled back to have enough space to bump his head back into Bad’s. Bad’s calming words ceased, and a thin tail kept a more solid hold around Dream’s back.

“...I’m sorry,” Dream whispered.

“Sorry? About what?”

“...this shouldn’t keep happening,” Dream muttered.

“What shouldn’t keep happening?” asked Bad, pulling away so he could look Dream in the eye (when had the mask gone over to the side of his head?). Dream flapped a hand between them to indicate their positions. Bad sighed. He set a hand the back of Dream’s head and tucked it under his. “Oh, Dream. You’re such a dumb muffin. Don’t apologize for being a person and needing help.”

The hold should be smothering. His face was pushed against the soft heavy fabric of Bad’s hoodie, and the hand behind his head was holding it in place like—But no, it was so different. The smell of heavy brimstone and sweet flour differed from heavy cologne and musty feathers. That place would be different too. No one would be pushing for closing the courtyard and potatoes instead of steak. The cell would have more comfortable living conditions. And Quackity was dead. *But Sam wasn’t.*

Skeppy couldn't stay there.

Dream let himself lean in a little, and then he pulled away.

"Let's break Skeppy out."

A quiet whoop came from behind Bad. Both of them whipped over to where the door was. A chagrinned Ranboo cringed. The tall teen cleared his throat.

"Sorry. You were busy and I didn't want to interrupt but Niki wanted to check what happened to Bad while she and Techno kept an eye on our guest. I didn't mean to overhear what you were saying especially since you were having a moment but then Ender thought what if someone else came this way and saw and heard what you were doing so we decided it was best if we stayed here and I guess we got a little invested?"

"How long have you been standing there?" Bad asked. Dream stared hard at the fidgeting enderman hybrid.

"...since around when Dream said Tubbo was a spy?" Ranboo twitchily confessed. Bad huffed.

"You should have said something," Bad scolded.

"I didn't want to interrupt!" Ranboo burst, but he didn't look at either of them. After a couple of silent seconds, he quickly added, "Should I get Niki and Techno in here?"

"...come here," Dream whispered. Ranboo's twitchy tail and body held still.

"...what?"

“Come here,” Dream repeated more firmly. The tall teen gave one last full body twitch, and then he slowly dragged himself over to the side of the bed. Dream crossed his arms.

“ሠላጠሡ. ጠዕሉ'ቅ ፎታሩቅ ቅታታታታታ.”

Red and green eyes blinked into green and red.

“ፎሠ'ኝ ያዕጠሠ ቅዕ ፎታሩቅ ታኝ,” Ender hissed. He glowered down at Dream. “ቅላጠ ስ ጠዕ ለዕቅ ቅሩዕሀዕጽፋሠ ምዕሩ ሠቅጸሠኝጠሩዕሩዕላጽ. ዙዕቢ ቅሩሠ ልሠሀሀ ያላዕላጠ ምዕሩ ያሠሠሩላጽ ስጠሩዕሩቅ ቅላጠ ስላምዕሩጠቅ ቅዕላ ምዕጠ ታኝ.”

Dream glowered back. “ጠዕ ዙዕቢ ቅፎላጽ ቅፎቅቅ ትቅጠ ልዕቢሀጠ ሀሠቅ ጠሠ ያሠሠሩ ቅፎላጽ ምዕጠ ዙዕቢ?”

“ፎሠ ልቅኝ ፎሠሀሩላጽ ዙዕቢ ሀሠቅጸሠ ታኝ,” Ender hissed sharply. “ከ ፎቅጸሠ ለዕ ሩሠቅኝዕላ ቅዕ ቅሩታኝቅ ቅፎሠ ጠሠጠዕላ.”

“ቅላጠ ዙዕቢ ጠዕሉ'ቅ ቅሩታኝቅ ጠሠ.”

“ዙዕቢ ሩቅላ. ዙዕቢ ሀሠቅቅ ታኝ,” Ender’s hiss shook into a warble. “ዙዕቢ ልሠሩ ያዕላጽ ቅዕ ሀሠቅጸሠ ታኝ ቅላጠ ለሠጸሠ ያዕጠሠ ትቅያዕ.”

Dream looked into the oddly wet green and red eyes. The solid weight still wrapped around his back prompted a thought, and he reached up and pulled the tall enderman into the circle of his arms. The smooth-skinned face buried itself into the top of Dream’s shoulder.

“ከ ያላዕላ ዙዕቢ ልዕሉ'ቅ ትሠሀሀጸሠ ጠሠ ዙሠቅ,” Dream warbled back. “ትታቅ ከ ልዕሉ'ቅ ሀሠቅጸሠ ዙዕቢ ቅጽቅላ. ከኝ ኝዕሩሩኑ.”



Dream and crossed against each other. “I ΔΔ { } wλ Φ Φ ⊖ □ wL ≠ H ⊖ Π. I □ Δ Δ w { } w Δ w Δ  
H ≠ ≠ Π ≠ ⊖ { } w. λ ⊖ Φ □ I λ σ I Δ Δ λ Δ ⊖ Δ Δ λ λ ⊖ Φ ≠ w Δ ⊖ λ w ≠ H H ≠ L I σ □ Φ w ≠ { } I Δ w.”

Dream blinked, and the black and white code in front of him swirled too fast. Black ones and zeros pushed away from black-outlined white. Panicked he pushed his hand against the black code to keep in place. The attempt barely did anything. He pushed harder. Solid weight fell on both of his shoulders.

“Δ ⊖ λ ⊖ Φ { } Φ ⊖ ≠ Φ □ I { },” warbled a resigned voice from the fading black code. “I Φ □ Δ { }  
≠ w w λ L ⊖ λ σ ≠ Δ { } Φ Φ I Δ w Δ ⊖ H w Φ ⊖ ≠ w Φ Π ≠ λ Φ ⊖ H ⊖ Φ □ w.”

“No,” Dream wheezed past his closing throat. “We need you—”

The black code turned from side to side. “H ⊖ Π Δ ⊖ λ' Φ λ w w Δ H w Δ λ H H ⊖ ≠ w.”

“Then I—I ≠ w σ Π w { } Φ H ⊖ Π { } Φ Δ H,” Dream said as firmly as he could in a strained whisper. “Π λ Φ I L Φ □ I λ σ { } □ Δ Δ w { } w Φ Φ L w Δ Δ I Φ □ Φ □ w ⊖ Φ □ w ≠ { }.”

The black code stilled.

“⊖ σ Δ H,” the black code vwooped. The black-outlined white shifted to prominence. Dream blinked and felt his breath hiccup. He flipped the mask back onto his face.

“He’s quiet,” Ranboo whispered with a growingly echoey horror. “He’s there, but he’s quiet. He’s never been quiet. Not since...” The tail brushed again against Dream’s wrist but again failed to take hold. “He—He’s serious. He’s going to—”

“He won’t,” Dream said too firmly. Too solidly. His fingers failed to feel the covers under them. “But we need to focus on breaking Skeppy out first.”

Wide, agape red and green eyes stared at Dream and retreated from him.

“...does he even matter to—” A white hand slammed over the questioning mouth, but Dream could hear the rest. “I didn’t—”

“We had better get started,” Dream interrupted. He didn’t want empty, lying explanations. He wanted to be done. With this. With everything. But he couldn’t hide. He wouldn’t. It’s not like they would let him. (Not even Ender.)

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“Skeppy’s gotten himself locked up in some version of the prison you were in? Major L.”

Dream managed a soft scoff. Only Techno could put it so blatantly. (How had he guessed about the prison?)

“I don’t get it,” Tommy protested from Dream’s left. Dream spread his quivering fingers over the End portal blocks making up his corner of the table and kept his breaths as even as possible. He had a duty to fulfill. He wouldn’t let his body betray him again. “How did the prison get built in the first place? Didn’t Dream f— commission it in the other life or something?”

“Language,” Bad snapped from in front of Dream. His voice remained low not to wake the sleeping piglin in his lap. His arms tensed around Peace, and Dream breathed easier. “And honestly, if you give it some thought, it’s easy to guess how the prison still happened. Especially after Dream started truly going against the Egg.”

“Weren’t you the one codingly bound with the thing?” Niki piped up from next to Bad. “Shouldn’t you know that?”

“Yeah. Let me sit here and reminisce about that glorious time I was fused to a f— virus for months,” Tommy bit out. His hands clutched at Dream’s sleeve. They were trembling.

“The E—*It* likely had it built to threaten me with,” Dream whispered over Bad’s muttered “language.” Given the increased trembling, he raised the volume of the next words. “The others probably have no idea why *it* built it in the first place.”

“They have no problem putting it to use though,” Techno said, leaning back in his chair. Blood red eyes glinted, and Dream lifted an eyebrow. He let out a low grunt (or tried to, it came out a little...squeaky). An amused snort proceeded an actually low grunt, and Dream scowled.

“Can we stick to Human around everyone that can’t understand other languages?” Niki complained.

“She’s right,” Ranboo said quietly from his corner of the rectangular table. Niki leaned onto the table to look past Bad and to Ranboo incredulously.

“You’re one to talk.”

“I didn’t do it on purpose. It wasn’t even me—” Ranboo began to protest before slumping into himself and looking away. Niki’s accusing gaze shifted and gained worried shadows.

“Got it. Stick to Human for you poor mortals. Except when we have guests,” Techno said. The last word came out low and dark. Dream pressed his hands harder onto the cold, rough texture of the otherworldly material. He briefly considered turning the blocks, setting them back into use, and going to the dark emptiness surrounding the Ender Dragon’s Isle.

“Including Tubbo,” Tommy said. The teen’s fingers dug into Dream’s arm sharply.

“What did you say to him to keep him out of here?” Niki asked.



“Nothing. He fell asleep. And Tech put an alarm on him just in case he wakes up,” Tommy said. Dream’s arm throbbed. “Are we sure we can’t just kick the m— out?”

“Language,” Bad hissed as he placed hands around Peace’s sleeping ears.

“He came because he was worried about you,” Niki said, keeping her voice from getting to soft. Tommy audibly grit his teeth together.

“So worried he’s been f— spying on you the whole time!” Tommy cried. Peace stirred in Bad’s arms, and Bad instantly began rocking the small piglin while mouthing “language” to Tommy. The teen winced and spoke in a quieter volume. (Quieter for Tommy anyway.) “What if he’d found Peace?”

Dream’s nails chipped as they scratched at the hard, ragged surface.

“I don’t think Tubbo would have done anything to him,” Niki defended, but her brown eyes fixed on a point between Dream and Techno.

“He would have told the other f—, and they f— would,” Tommy hissed in muted shout.

“Language! And we have to focus on what’s happening and not on what might happen,” Bad said quickly. Wide, white eyes stared into Dream’s. The dark form rocked a rhythm of in and out breaths. Dream’s body automatically copied, and he instantly scowled at the realization. Bad shook his head, and Dream’s scowl dropped behind a well-practiced neutral expression. Bad let out a sigh and continued. “What should we do first? Obviously I think we should get Skeppy out first, but that would let the others know we suspect them. They might do something stupid to try to get to us and hurt themselves or us in the process.”

“We could leave Skeppy for now and focus on gaining information,” Techno said flatly. “The opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself” and all that. Knowing what exactly is going on over there should help us figure out how best to counter whatever plans they cook up. Skeppy should be fine. It’s not like they’ll tortur—”

“We’re getting Skeppy out as fast as possible,” Dream burst out. He pushed past images of red-stained purple-cracked obsidian. “He might—We cannot trust people, especially Sam, to not use Skeppy as an outlet for—It’s not safe for Skeppy there. Pa—” His throat closed around the word, but he cleared it forcefully. “The prison was never meant for anything good.”

Every open eye at the table had turned towards him, and he stood firm in their joined gazes. He held himself steady and sure. (But the loosening fingers around his arm rattled with its subtle shaking, and thin, black clad shoulders drooped, and full pink lips had teeth pressing into them, and enderman eyes kept flashing red and green and green and red, and the blood red eyes gained a darker, glinting hue.)

“So you’re saying it would be better razed to the ground?” Techno asked almost casually. Dream nodded tightly. “Sure. Sounds like fun. Chat likes the idea. Let’s go raze a prison to bedrock then.”

“What about Tubbo?” Tommy asked, the grip on Dream’s arm tightening again. “Are we f— kicking him out or not?”

“...is that what you want?” Dream asked.

“Of course,” Tommy scoffed. “What else would he do here? Pretend to be friends with me and Ranboob over here? While trying to find out state secrets? And then eating our share of Bad’s f— muffins?!”

“For goodness’ sake, language!” Bad snapped. A snorting shuffling rustled in Bad’s lap. Tiny white eyes blinked around the table. With all the adults watching him, Peace clambered sleepily onto the table and stumbled across to Dream. He half-fell into Dream’s lap. The small head bobbed up and down a couple of times unsteadily, and Dream leaned down so Peace’s forehead hit his. Satisfied, Peace cuddled into Dream’s lap and closed his eyes. He was instantly back to sleep. Given the child’s closeness, Dream ran the command for muting the child’s hearing. His quick finger movements paused after the command ran.

He blinked and watched the code forming on his fingertips surround the small piglin's head. His heart heaved and dipped, but he quickly ran another command. Peace jolted back fully awake. Code flew from his fingertips again, and Peace's eyes slammed back shut. Tiny shuffling snores sputtered against his chest.

"What was that?" came a gasping sound from the other side of the table. Brown eyes gazed at Dream with confusion. "What did you do to him?"

"Shut down code," Dream explained tonelessly. His now free fingers tapped at his mask and slid it back over his face. "I realized that if I can shut down sound coming from or to an entity, then I could shut down the entity."

"Shut down as in—?" Niki said with widening horror.

"He forcefully put the kid to sleep. He could also kill him," Techno said with an overly relaxed shrug. He did not look at Dream. "Phil could. Hence the whole 'Angel of Death' thing. I should be surprised the Teletubby didn't already know that, but this idiot rarely uses his ridiculously OP powers."

"Should he be using them on Peace like that?" Niki asked. She stared at the small piglin in Dream's lap. "It won't hurt him will it?"

"No," Dream said with a snap despite the painful stutter of guilt in his chest. He repositioned Peace close to his chest. The small piglin shuffled again and pushed his head under Dream's chin. Dream's heart lost its painful beat. "I can do it to Tubbo."

A quiet lull fell over the group as brown eyes flashed to white and then red and finally red and green. The enderman shuffled and a tufted tail looped around his white hand, and the ghostly grip tightened again. Techno huffed.

"If it'll keep the spy out of our hair, that's fine by me," Techno stated.

“It’s messing with personal code,” Bad said a level above a whisper. “Most Admins wouldn’t take it so far. Maybe we could trap him in barriered area?”

“...like an invisible cell?” Dream said barely keeping above a whisper. Everyone else shifted uncomfortable except Tommy.

“Look, Big D. We’re not those f—,” Tommy scoffed loudly as he clutched even tighter onto Dream’s arm. Bad cried out “Language,” but Peace didn’t even twitch. “We won’t do anything to him. I get that you have serious s— with prisons, but for most people would rather be put in a s— cell than have someone messing with their code.”

“He’s right,” Ranboo said, facing the fluff at the end of his tail as he picked at it with his free hand. “He’d prefer to be locked up.”

“And you know that because you know Tubbo so well all of a sudden, huh, Ranboob?” Tommy snapped.

“He was under the Egg’s influence,” Ranboo said softly. Tommy flinched. Dream gazed over at Bad, who slowly nodded. He locked gazes with Dream.

“I don’t think anyone on the server would want their personal code messed with right now,” Bad said. Dream looked at the quiet expressions on the faces around the table. None of them looked him in the eyes.

“Fine. Lock him up then,” Dream said. He made sure his arms remained circled around Peace’s form. “I won’t help.”

“That’s fine,” Bad said with a widening smile. “You let us take care of that. Did you happen to find out where the prison is?”

“Ant knows,” Dream said carefully. “He seemed willing to help. We could get him to show us and bring him back here in return.”

“You want to bring someone back here?” Niki said with narrowed eyes.

“If it will free Skeppy,” Dream said with a shrug.

“You’re such a liar,” she said with a face splitting grin. “But yeah, we can bring Ant back. We kinda owe him twice now.”

“Oo, maybe we should finally get to building another house here. One that can fit a few more of us in case other people want to join us,” Bad said excitement running through his voice and form. “But only if that’s okay with Dream though.”

“Ant and Skeppy are the only ones coming,” Dream answered. “After Tubbo, we have to be more careful who we let in the barrier.”

“Are we going to kick Tubbo out?” asked Ranboo. The tufted tail unwound from the white wrist and curled around a white ankle instead.

“We could just kick the traitor out now,” Tommy grumbled.

“It would tip our hand,” Techno explained. “He’d go straight back.”

Dream stilled, a possibility striking through his head.

“Why don’t we?” Dream said, his thoughts racing in his brain.

“What? Why the f— would we do that?!” Tommy cried, pulling back and tugging Dream’s arm with him. Dream’s lips slid into an once well-used smirk.

“To let the enemy provide of course.”

Four of the group exchange bemused and frustrated glances while the fifth let a bloodthirsty grin grace his face.

“Finally,” Techno said through his grin. “I thought you were going to mope the whole session and make me plan something. So what are we going to need?”

“Fifteen invis potions, seven strength potions, twelve fire resistance potions, eighteen milk buckets, ten diamond pickaxes, and a warden.”

Techno’s brows raised.

“What, no withers?”

“We can add them if you want,” Dream said casually, feeling his lips curve into sharp edges matching Techno’s own.

“Nah. I have a better idea.”

Dream tilted his head in question.

“Two words: invisible creepers.”

Dream’s face felt like it was about to spilt into two.

“Remind me to never get on your guys’ bad side,” Ranboo offered cautiously from where he had slunk deeper into his seat. Bad shook his head and said nothing. Niki echoed their grin.

“This is sounding more fun by the minute. Though I am wondering how you plan to raze the prison to the ground. Nothing you’ve mentioned I want that thing long gone.”

Techno and Dream looked at each other. They looked like absolute maniacs, but Dream couldn't stop grinning

“Withers?” Dream asked eagerly.

“Withers,” Techno agreed near instantly. They both turned to Niki and spoke in unison.

“Withers.”

## Chapter End Notes

Oops... I forgot. Here's the translation (though there's another in the comments. Thanks Ayonne!)

$\psi \wedge \Box \psi \rightarrow \Box \psi \wedge \Box \neg \Box \psi \subseteq \Box \neg \Box \psi \rightarrow \Box \neg \Box \psi$ . – Ender. Don't hurt tubbo.

⊢<sub>ψ</sub>'<sub>3</sub> Ω<sub>0</sub>⊃<sub>ψ</sub> Φ<sub>0</sub> ⊢<sub>λ</sub>⊃Φ λ<sub>3</sub>. – He's come to hurt us.

ብላጠባ ስለሆነ ብንቀርብም ይታወቃል። ከዚህ በተጨማሪም የሰው ጥበብና የሕይወት አስተሳሰብ ማስተላለፍ ያለብን ዓላማ አለን። - And I do not apologize for eavesdropping. You are well known for keeping important information from us.

– Do you think that Bad would let me keep things from you?

$\Xi\psi \triangleleft \Delta\}$   $\Xi\psi \nabla \neq \lambda\sigma \nmid \ominus \sqcap \nabla\psi \triangleleft \diamond\psi \sqcap\}$ . – He was helping you leave us.

I  $\subseteq \Delta \supset \Delta \wedge \square \neg \psi \Delta \{ \square \Delta \} \overline{\Phi} \square \overline{\Phi} \neg \sqcap \{ \overline{\Phi} \} \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \psi \sqsupset \sqsupset \sqsupset \square \Delta$ . – I have no reason to trust the demon.

$\Delta \wedge \neg (\neg \vee) \rightarrow \neg$ . – And you don't trust me.

𐎧𐎡𐎴𐎧 𐎧𐎡𐎴𐎧 𐎧𐎡𐎴𐎧 𐎧𐎡𐎴𐎧 𐎧𐎡𐎴𐎧, – You ran. You left us,

፡ክብሩ ሲሆን ያልተመለሰህ ብሎናል። ሆኖም አስታውረዋል፦ “አንተ ነገር አልተሰማህም፤ እኛ ነገር አልተሰማንም።” – You were going to leave us and never come back.

I know you won't believe me yet,

$\equiv \Pi \overline{\Phi} \text{ i } \Delta \ominus \wedge' \overline{\Phi} \not\sqsubset \Psi \triangleleft \Delta \Psi \not\vdash \ominus \Pi \triangleleft \sigma \triangleleft \text{i} \wedge$ . – But I won't leave you again.

$\nabla \perp \vdash \bot$ . – You'd better not.

𐌷𐌰𐌱𐌰𐌽𐌰𐌶𐌰 𐌲𐌰𐌽𐌰𐌶𐌰𐌽𐌰𐌶𐌰 𐌲𐌰𐌽𐌰𐌶𐌰𐌽𐌰𐌶𐌰. – You would make Ranboo sad.

$$\psi \wedge [\cdot] \psi \text{?} - \text{Ender?}$$

I ♡ {Φ Φ} – I exist too.

$\exists x \Omega x \wedge \{x \nVdash_{\Omega} x \oplus i\} \overline{\Phi}$ . – Of course you exist.

$U_{\bigcirc\bigcirc}\{\Psi-U\neq\Psi\} \mathcal{J}_{\bigcirc\bigcirc}U, -$  Loose-lipped fool

Ի  $\Delta \triangle \nabla$  ձևի  $\{ \omega, \lambda, \overline{\Phi}, \overline{\Phi}_0, \underline{\Xi}, \omega, \nabla \neq \nabla, \Omega, \Gamma, \text{ և } \underline{\Xi} \triangle \diamond \omega \}$   $\{ \omega \neq \diamond \omega, \nabla \nabla \neq \nabla, \nabla \neq \nabla, \nabla \neq \nabla \}$   $\omega, \lambda, \overline{\Phi}, \underline{\Xi} \nabla \lambda \diamond$  և

፩፭፻፲፱ ጥቅምት ፳፯ ቀን ፳፻፲፱ ዓ.ም. - I was sent to help you. I have served my purpose. Nothing I can do cannot be done by my lighter side.

$\{ \} \subseteq \bigwedge \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \setminus \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \{ \}.$  – Do not stop this.

iΦ ⊆ Δ { ≡ W W Λ U ⊙ ∂ ≠ Δ } Φ Φ i h w s o x h w Φ ⊙ ≠ w Φ l ≠ λ Φ ⊙ h ⊙ Φ ⊆ w ≠ . – It has been long past time for me to return to Mother.

ከዚህ በፊት ሰው አይደለም፡- You don't need me anymore.

I request you stay,

$\sqcap \wedge \overline{\Phi} \text{ i } \overline{U} \ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \text{ i } \wedge \sigma \} \sqsubseteq \Delta \diamond \omega \ \{ \omega \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \overline{U} \omega \sqcap \} \Delta \text{ i } \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \circ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \bowtie \}.$  – Until things have settled with the others.

☐☐☐△≠ – Okay



# Interlude: Friendly Folly

## Chapter Summary

Tubbo warns the others that the Egg-Lovers know he was a spy and now have Tommy captive. Sapnap leads the charge to rescue Tommy and get Dream back.

## Chapter Notes

This is an interlude, which means it will not be from Dream's POV. Also it gets fairly violent in sections. Read carefully.

Also Ayonne did a wonderful job betaing this chapter! So it's edited and everything!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wiggles shivered down Tubbo's whole body, and he gasped awake. He threw off the blanket in horror as it moved around him on its own. The moving blanket flapped in the air tauntingly a few times before it fell limp onto the floor.

"Finally!" exclaimed a voice over where the blanket had fallen. "That took f\*\*\*\* forever."

"Tommy?" Tubbo whispered into the empty air.

"Yeah, me. Unless you know another ghost that can go invisible?"

"Hey, for all you know, Ghostbur can do it too."

"Doubt it, Big T," continued Tommy's disembodied voice (Tubbo tried not to think about how that was the only way his voice could be.) "I think different ghosts get different things. Ghostbur gets to touch people other than Dream, and I get to turn invisible."

“If you say so, Toms,” Tubbo said, swinging his legs to dangle the side of the bed. “So did you need something? Want to play Uno again?”

“Tubs, you gotta leave.”

“What?” Tubbo said. Rasps clawed inside his chest, and his fingers tingled at their tips. (Had they found out? Did Tommy want him to leave? He had to get Tommy out of here! He wouldn’t leave without Tommy *even if Tommy hated him* .)

“They think you’re a spy or some s\*\*\*\*. I tried to talk ‘em out of it, but they’re convinced. If you don’t get out of here, Dream’s going to do some Admin s\*\*\*\* and make you a match for Sleeping Beauty Gogy.”

“That—He can’t,” Tubbo said, his breath shaky and squeaky. “He can’t do that. No Admin can—can put people to sleep. And if he could have, he would have done it earlier—unless that’s what happened to George.”

“Huh? Gogy’s really a sleeping beauty? Should probably let Dream know about that.”

“No!” Tubbo burst at his now visible friend’s calm, pensive look. He needed Tommy to understand. He couldn’t stay. He couldn’t. Not with Dream. (*Not with the Egg-Lover.*) He tried to grab Tommy’s fingers, but his own passed through. “You need to come with me! It’s not safe here. What if Dream pulls that sleeping beauty thing on you?”

Tommy’s transparent form appeared floating upside down and unimpressed in front of Tubbo’s nose.

“Tubbo, I’m a ghost. There’s no point doing any of that Admin s\*\*\*\* on me. I’m literally dead,” Tommy said flatly and almost emotionlessly. So unlike Tommy. (The E— *it* was getting to Tommy again. He was falling under *its* control. Only more naturally this time. He’d be like Tubbo. Maybe he’d get Tubbo’s code ripped to pieces in an effort to get him back.)

“You don’t know that, Toms. Please, come with me to Kinoko. It’s safer there. And everyone else lives either in it or nearby. Ghostbur’s there so you can even have ghost-to-ghost company. You can’t tell me you like living out here in the f\*\*\*\*\* middle of nowhere.”

“Why not? It’s the f\*\*\*\*\* middle of nowhere. So guess what? No one can exile me. Where would they exile me to? The middle of somewhere?”

Tubbo’s face cooled to ice, and he swallowed.

“Tommy, I—”

“F\*\*\*\*\* it. Now’s not the time for this s\*\*\*\*. We gotta get you out of here.”

“I’m not leaving without you,” Tubbo said firmly, crossing his arms. Irritation crossed Tommy’s transparent face.

“Fine. I’ll follow you invisibly. Happy?”

“How do I know if you’re following me?”

“You’ll have to f\*\*\*\*\* trust me,” said Tommy. Tubbo winced but shook his head.

“Why would you need to be invisible, bossman?”

“Because—Because I f\*\*\*\*\* want to!” Tommy nearly growled. Shaking his head, he pouted in that way he used to do when things hadn’t gone his way. (That line of thought was dumb. Tommy still pouted. He was still right here in front of Tubbo.) “Fine. It’s completely fine. Double fine really. You know what? Make that triple fine. I’ll go with you. And I’ll stay

visible. Just so you can be 1000% sure I'm following you. Now let's f\*\*\*\* go before the others wake up!"

Grinning, Tubbo hurriedly checked the items in his inventory. He paused over the odd item he'd been given before coming into the Egg-Lover's lair. The instructions had been to leave it inside the Egg-lovers' base in the case of an urgent need to escape. He shrugged and took the book out.

"Now's not the time for a leisurely read, Tubs," Tommy scowled.

"I'm not going to read it," Tubbo said quickly. "I thought I should leave something in thanks for everyone's hospitality."

"Really? Why a book?"

"The Blade likes to read, doesn't he?" Tubbo asked softly. This time, Tommy winced, and Tubbo laid the book on the shelf nearby. "Now he's got one more book to read."

"Sure. Whatever," Tommy said with obvious frustration (who thought Tubbo could out-annoy Tommy). "At this rate you're going to be Sleeping Gogy 2.0. And if you're really lucky 100 years from now some idiot will pour honey on you and finally manage to wake you up."

"Let's get going then. Would be terrible to waste some poor bee's honey like that."

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They had no trouble until they got to the barrier blocks. Tommy led them both to a small hole that could lead outside.

“I followed Technoblade invisibly one day when I was bored. Turns out this is how he gets in and out into the nearby area. Better than Ranboob. He just uses his broken cheat powers to teleport out of the barrier. He f\*\*\*\* sucks.”

“I had a lot of fun with Ranboo,” Tubbo commented as he subtly made a note of the hole’s coordinates. “Maybe someday we should come back to get him.”

“Hm? Why?”

“Cause it’s not safe here,” Tubbo replied automatically. Realizing that Tommy might get the wrong (right) idea, he quickly added. “Not if people start being put to sleep around here like George. We should come back and check. Just in case.”

“If you say so, Tubs,” said Tommy breezily. “Pretty sure you’ll have to pry Ranboob with a massive crowbar to get him away from here. He’s a multiversal Dream Stan, though I guess he doesn’t always remember.”

Deciding it would be better not to answer, Tubbo crawled into the tight squeeze the hole created. At first the hole was more than wide enough (because of course it would be to hold a person of Techno’s size), but then oddly the hole tightened. It actually felt like it was getting smaller and squeezing around them.

“F\*\*\*\*,” Tommy shouted. Tubbo instantly turned around. The ghostly blond lay in an awkward angle midair.

“What’s wrong?”

“Techno might have mentioned the hole closing up from time to time to make sure s\*\*\*\* doesn’t get in,” Tommy said, his voice began to grow more tense. “You got to start moving.”

“I’m not leaving you,” Tubbo said, but he began to feel the blocks below him pressing upwards. He reached out to grab Tommy’s hand. His fingers phased through his best friend’s

fingers. He gave a wordless cry of frustration.

“I’ll be fine! I’ll wait until the hole opens and get out!” Tommy said, urgency increasing.  
“For f\*\*\*\* sake, run Tubbo!”

“Not without you!” Tubbo repeated. His head bumped with the invisible block on top of him even as the bottom one pushed harder against his chest.

“I’m dead!” Tommy yelled back. “If I get squished, I get trapped for an hour or two. You f\*\*\*\* die! Go get help! You can come back to get me!”

Wet heat blurred Tubbo’s eyes. Illusionary vines pierced Tommy’s chest and squeezed into his heart ( *at Tubbo’s request* ). He had wanted his friend more than he wanted his friend to be safe. He wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. (He couldn’t.)

“I’ll be back,” Tubbo promised. He held his hand perfectly in line with Tommy’s see-through fingers. “I promise, Toms.”

Tommy’s transparent blue eyes flickered with shadows, but they darkened and hardened. Tommy grinned wide enough to show all his teeth. Tubbo shuddered.

“I trust you, Tubs,” Tommy said, matching his fingers to Tubbo’s. “Now get out of here, Big T.”

With a shaky nod, Tubbo wiggled out of the narrowing passage and out into the snow piled on the other side. Tommy remained locked into the odd laying position. Tearing his attention away from his best friend’s distress, he ran. He ran faster than he thought he ever could and down into the nearby valley, marking his coordinates and progress as he passed through.

After finding a cave he took out his half-stack of obsidian and created a portal. Moments later he was in the Nether.

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“You found a weak point?” Sapnap asked eagerly. It was almost too good to be true. A hole in Dream’s barrier? And one created for the brother-thief himself? He grinned at the thought of the mighty Techno being the reason Dream’s delusions finally fell. Why the Egg would finally lose.

The shaken kid nodded.

“I have its coordinates. It’s not open all the time. It nearly closed on top of me, and it did close on—” Tubbo started but didn’t finish. A moment of silence stretched as Sapnap’s discomfort grew. He knew Tommy was involved somehow, but how he didn’t know or care. But he did care about Tubbo. “We need to get back there and get him out!”

Okay. So Tommy was stuck in the barrier. That was a hilarious image, but one that would upset Tubbo. With a deep breath, Sapnap kept himself from laughing and his tone serious.

“We’ll head over there just as soon as we round everyone up.”

“What about the prisoner?” asked Punz from behind Sapnap’s shoulder. Sapnap paused. Right. They couldn’t leave Un—the prisoner alone. He was well known for getting out of tough spots.

“You should stay here. That way they can’t suspect you. But if they do, you can say something like you didn’t know what Tubbo was thinking. Keep some of their trust,” Sapnap decided. He grinned. Dream would be proud of him, thinking ahead like that. Usually Dream would be the one making sure they’re covered in case of the worst. “Thanks, Punzie.”

“Please don’t call me that,” Punz sighed. He was smiling. “It’s a solid plan.”

“I appreciate your approval, Punzie,” Sapnap grinned widely. The grin grew as he typed a message to summon all of Kinoko to his coordinates. He was going to get his best friend back. “Now let’s hurry up! We don’t want the Egg-Lovers getting suspicious.”

“And we have to save Tommy,” Tubbo added.

“Of course,” Sapnap said.

“What about Tommy?” asked a light voice. Ghostbur floated inches in front of Sapnap.

“We’re finally going to rescue him,” Sapnap answered. “Want to come with or stay here?”

“I want to help Tommy,” Ghostbur said. His transparent brow wrinkled. “But who’ll take care of Friend?”

“I can,” Punz offered. “I’m staying here.”

“Okay. Thank you, Mr. Mercenary!” Ghostbur said happily. Wool dripping blue was shoved into Punz’s face. “Want some blue?”

“No thank you,” Punz said, stepping backwards. Ghostbur pressed closer and smashed the messy blue into Punz’s face. The mercenary tried to dodge, but the blue smeared all over slightly tan cheeks. Some of it dripped onto Punz’s white hoodie.

“You look better now!” Wilbur exclaimed. Rubbing at the newest blue stain, Punz glared at the oblivious ghost. “Do you think Tommy will like blue?”

“He’ll be happier to see you,” Tubbo said softly. The kid’s whole form vibrated. “What is taking everyone so d\*\*\*\* long?”



“I came here as soon as I heard,” an unwelcomed voice gasped between heavy breaths. Sapnap held back a heated hiss as Ant bent in two to catch his breath. “We’re saving Dream?”

“‘We’ are. You’re staying here with Punz,” Sapnap snapped. “There’s no reason for you to come. You should have stayed in your house.”

“Oh...but didn’t you say I had to answer all summons?”

“I didn’t tell you to come here.”

“Didn’t you tell all of Kinoko to come here?”

Sapnap scowled. “That doesn’t include you.”

“But—”

“He meant all the trusted citizens,” Punz quickly clarified. Sapnap decided to let the mercenary deal with the possible Egg-Lover. Not that Sapnap understood the point of soothing a possible Egg-Lover’s feelings, but Punz was better at negotiating to get what they needed. “You’re not there yet.”

“Hi, Kitty-cat!” Ghostbur floated over to Ant and rubbed between his ears. Ant hissed and ducked under the pets. Undaunted Ghostbur held out dripping blue. “Want some blue?”

“No thank you,” Ant said ever so politely. Probably why he and Da— *the* Egg-Lover got along.

“Hey there!” called another voice. Puffy waved a sword as she ran over. “Did you find a way in?”

“I did,” Sapnap said with renewed excitement. “We’re getting him back.”

“Them,” Puffy reminded. “We’re going to get Niki and Tommy too.”

“Of course,” Sapnap agreed. “But even if the only one we get back is Dream, he’s more than enough. He can help us get the rest back later.”

“But we’re aiming for all three first,” Puffy pressed.

“I already said ‘of course,’” Sapnap said in a heated hiss. “But Dream has to be our primary goal.”

“What about Tommy?!” Tubbo demanded. Letting out a fizzling sigh, Sapnap nodded at the boy. It was definitely better to try to calm the kid down before he became a problem.

“You said he was following you out already. If we get Dream to come with us, he’ll follow for sure.”

Tubbo scowled and crossed his arms, but he didn’t argue again. They’d get them back. They’d get all three of them back.

Slowly the others came. Sam huffed up the hill and remained quiet and ready next to a nervous Ponk. Fundy scurried forward with a plodding Jack behind him. So few of them left. Eret, Purpled, Vikkstar, and Lazarbeam had fled the server as soon as the Egg’s influence had been lifted, and no one had been added after Ranboo. So short of the large sprawling community that Dream, George, and him had dreamed of. But once Sapnap got Dream back, they could go back to building up the SMP into a properly populated world. Maybe even convince the four from before to come back.

Of course Callahan wasn't present, secretive as he was, and George... George would come back. He'd stay awake if Dream was here.

"Everybody ready?" Sapnap asked. Various voices sounded affirmatives. A wild grin split his face. "Let's show those Egg-Lovers what we f\*\*\*\* think of them!"

Loud cheers echoed his call.

"Lead the way, Tubs!" Sapnap said, looking down at the kid. The short teen nodded firmly and started towards the Nether portal. Everyone pulled out their armor and preferred weapons and followed. Exchanging one last eager look with Punz, Sapnap hurried to take his place beside Tubbo near the front.

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Sam squeezed the handle of his hammer. He had no idea what they were walking into. Sapnap had explained some of what Tubbo had discovered after infiltrating the Egg-Lovers' domain, but the exact plan of how to recover those under the Egg's continued influence hadn't been elaborated. Not that Sam worried about it too much. As long as the server could be cleared of the Egg's influence, as long as Tubbo and the others would be safe, Sam would be okay with anything.

"It's over there!" Tubbo called, pointing to a mountain completely covered in snow from top to bottom. That was a strange sight.

"Wait," Sam said quickly but quietly. Everyone paused to stare at him. Their gleaming netherite armor did its best to blend into the darkness of the night in the forest, but they would be crossing an empty valley to reach the snow wall that was the side of the mountain. They had to be prepared.

He reached into his inventory and pulled out a pick. With too many eyes on him, he dug deep into the ground, about fifty blocks or so. Soon he was readjusting the dirt to hide the little dug-out alcove. He set a bed in the middle of it. Along the wall, he placed a previously crafted chest and filled it with all his extra equipment. Carving out somewhat natural-looking stairs, he stood in front of the intimidating stares. Tubbo's was a full-on glare at this point.

“Reset your spawn point. Place any replacement equipment in the chest. We don’t want to end up all the way back in Kinoko if anything goes wrong.”

“He’s right,” Sapnap agreed. They exchanged glances, and Sapnap gave him a nostalgic grin. “When hunting Dreams, beds are a must.” The grin faded. Likely as he recalled who exactly came up with that saying. Sam walked over to Sapnap as the others hurried to the bed. He placed a hand on the younger man’s shoulder.

“Remember him as he was,” Sam said softly.

“I know,” said Sapnap. Flint black eyes narrowed. “I hate that it used him.”

“I know,” said Sam, allowing the heaviness of sorrow to weigh on his tone. “We all do.”

“If I get a chance, I’m killing it,” Sapnap declared.

“Understood,” Sam said. He smiled large enough behind his mask for it to show in his eyes. He patted Sapnap’s shoulder. “Now go set your respawn.”

“I’m going, I’m going. No need to rush me, old man,” Sapnap grumbled, but his grin had returned. Sam rolled his eyes and watched the man jump into the hole.

“Are we certain he’s ready for this?” Ponk said, slinging his large ax over his metal shoulder. Sam winced at the reminder of what had happened between them under the Egg’s influence. Even now, Ponk stood three blocks away from him. Would he ever regain his friend’s trust? “I’m not a head doctor, but he doesn’t seem like he’s in the right headspace to lead anyone into battle.”

“He is ready for this,” Sam said. “And either way, he’s the most knowledgeable. George is the only other person who has more experience hunting Dream, and Sapnap knows all of the Egg-Lover’s tells. Besides, Puffy cleared him.”

“Yeah. Has anyone checked her credentials lately?” Ponk wondered out loud. Sam gave him a puzzled look. The healer took a couple of steps back. “Just asking.”

Smoke hissed out of Sam’s mask, and Ponk shuffled further back. The exact opposite action to what Sam wanted. Pressing a hand to his forehead, Sam forced himself to calm. He was getting nowhere. And they had more important things to deal with than broken trust.

“Don’t forget that I’ve hunted Dream in the past, too. We can’t underestimate him. Sapnap has more than once been the reason Dream didn’t run rings around us.”

Ponk grimaced but said nothing more. He greeted Ghostbur who floated through the ground and babbled about how he’d made the bed blue. If it weren’t for the fact that the ghost could literally move through obstacles with little danger or trouble, Sam would have questioned Sapnap’s insistence on his presence. Blue wool nearly slammed into his half-masked face.

“Want some blue?”

“No, thank you,” Sam said stiffly. This time he was the one stepping back. Wilbur was a nuisance alive or dead. “Have you asked Tommy yet?”

“Tommy?” Ghostbur asked, tilting his head. “He said he didn’t want blue. He said...he said...no more blue? For the blue to go away? I...I can’t remember.” His breezy, constant smile crumpled and twisted under transparent furrows. It quickly popped back into place. “But he likes red! Maybe I can get red for him?”

“You should ask him,” Sam guided. He held out a hand and pointed in the direction of the mountain. “If he does, I have some in my inventory. So, please, let me know before I use it.”

“Okay! I’ll do that!” Ghostbur exclaimed cheerily. He started to float off.

“Wait,” Sam commanded. The ghost obeyed. “Don’t let him know I have the red. He’s mad at me right now, so even if he likes red, he won’t take it. Not if it’s from me. So don’t tell him I am even here.”

“If you say so,” Ghostbur said as his floating feet near touched the ground. “But don’t you want him to know that you’re holding the red for him?”

“He will. But right now he won’t take it. Maybe after you give it to him, we can tell him together,” Sam said smoothly. The ghost brightened and bobbed, hurrying to the mountain. Satisfied that the ghost would bring some useful info, he turned back to the others as they clambered out of the hidden bed’s alcove. “Did everyone set their respawn?”

“Yep. We’re ready to go,” Jack said with a vicious smile. “Let’s go scramble some Eggheads.”

“We should wait a moment. I sent Ghostbur to collect some information.”

“What? Are you crazy?” Sapnap snapped. “Do you know what they—what the Egg-Lover did to him?!”

“No,” Sam said flatly. He raised an eyebrow. “I was not aware they had done anything to Ghostbur.”

“That’s because—s\*\*\*\*, he—he begged me not to say, but we need to get him back right now!” Sapnap near screamed. He lunged forward, but Sam caught his shoulder.

“If they hurt him, why did you bring him?” Sam asked. Something wasn’t making sense. Maybe Ponk had been corr—

“A Warden!” Fundy yelled. The fox hybrid pointed not to the mountain but behind them from the dark shadows in the forest. The others ran, and after making sure no one was behind him, Sam rushed towards the mountain. He frowned as Fundy and Jack curved away from the

mountain and towards a separate forest, but he understood. The two hadn't been overly eager to defend the server, but they had come. A Warden would have been too much—

Fundy screeched and turned back towards them as explosions burst under the forest shadows. Jack briefly stared stunned at the approaching explosions and then followed Fundy back over to where the rest of them dug into the side of the mountain. Given the growing hissing, the two were running from creepers. Not that Sam could make out the mob's distinctive green from here. A small opening had been carved out of the snow and held up by various cobblestone blocks. Ponk's work. He had always been a quick thinker.

"This way!" Sapnap shouted, either ignorant of the two's attempted desertion or unbothered by it. Sam let out a smoking hiss and took a second to scoff at himself. Sapnap had most certainly not noticed. He wouldn't be waiting for their arrival if he had.

Dashing through the opening, Sam plowed into Puffy, knocking the both of them off their feet. She quickly untangled herself and scrambled over to the barrier. Her hand pushed against the nearly invisible blocks.

"Tommy! Are you okay?"

"Puffy?" Tommy said groggily. He was floating in what was likely various barrier blocks with his body twisted into a position that had Sam wincing. His face brightened upon spotting them. "You came!"

"Of course we di—" Puffy started.

"Tommy!" Tubbo burst, rushing and smacking into the barrier face first. He pushed his whole body together as if trying to break it with his force alone. "We're here! I came back! We're going to get you out of there!"

Sam rushed over and slipped his arms under the young boy's armpits to yank him away from the barrier. Tubbo struggled to keep himself plastered on the barrier, and snot rubbed across the invisible blocks and smeared with the boy's tears. Puffy quickly moved to help Sam, pulling a handkerchief out of her captain jacket's pocket. She jammed it between Tubbo's

face and the formidable barrier blocks. Most of the face became less wet, and the disruption allowed Sam to pry Tubbo away.

“This isn’t helping him,” Puffy said softly. She kept wiping the boy’s face gently. “We’ll find a way to get him out soon.”

“...no. I left him. I left him too long. I’m never leaving him again!” Tubbo started out whispering and ended sobbing and yelling. “I’m here, Tommy! I’m not going—”

An explosion shook the ground that was no longer under them. Due to their positions and preoccupations, none of the three of them could grab a bucket. Sam felt his neck snap.

Heavy weights pressed Sam down into blue sheets. He pushed at the weights, and they moved, allowing him to breathe. He hated those precious seconds where breath was lost to him (where everything was pain). The creak of a chest opening had his eyes cracking open to catch Tubbo snapping on various pieces of netherite armor. He then ran up the stairs.

“No, Tubbo. Wait!” Puffy cried, grabbing her own equipment and running to catch up with the boy. Sam took one more stabilizing breath and hissed it out. Keeping his feelings level, he pulled out his second set of netherite armor and quickened his pace in order to rejoin the others.

A body flew into him and knocked Sam back off his feet. Tubbo’s breathing wheezed near his ear, and Sam checked the boy’s condition. He was barely conscious. Sam moved to wake the boy when he heard it. The deceitfully soft and slow plodding coming down the stairs. Whipping a hand around Tubbo’s mouth to stifle the boy’s breathing, Sam yanked the both of them back into the tiny alcove. He had less than a minute to figure out what spot would get them less likely to be noticed, and he tucked himself and Tubbo into the corner nearest the exit.

As if on cue, the torch over the bed darkened and lightened in a pulsing movement. A large, musclebound black giant squeezed through the entrance and stood crouched in the alcove. Holding the bow awkwardly in his hands while jamming Tubbo’s unconscious face into his chest, Sam shot an arrow into the wall farthest from them and the bed, right over the chest.



The Warden's head flicked in that direction, and the torch pulsed twice as the giant's black arms raised over his head. Sam took the cue to run towards the stairs. He couldn't stop the pounding of his footsteps, but a sudden despairing cry told him he didn't need to. One of the others had respawned straight into the Warden's blow. A loud, echoing crack reverberated, and Sam's comm beeped. The bed had been destroyed. Whoever had respawned was now likely at world spawn confused and dazed. What would happen to the rest—?

A second cry came from below, and Sam stopped. He shouldn't stop. Whatever was happening below with the person trapped by the Warden didn't matter. The person would either get out of the situation on their own, or they would respawn. Sam had more important things to attend to. Like the boy in his arms. Get them both out, find out what was happening with the others, get a new alcove this time with a door, and get them all to reset their respawn on a new bed.

Plan made, Sam clambered up into the forest floor. A low hiss so similar to his own sounded, and he grabbed his spare water bucket. A blast burst behind him, and he was airborne. He held tightly to the boy in one arm and spilled water from the bucket in the other. Scooping the water back up quickly, he was nearly ready when a second hiss signaled a second blast, but he wasn't. The blast sent him spinning, and between letting go of the bucket or letting go of the boy he chose the bucket. His neck did not break, but his head exploded with pain and his senses went black.

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The hisses whispered and snaked through the empty air from every direction. Fundy's whimpers answered their insistence with plain, terrified panic. The young fox hybrid smelled the gunpowder with enough time to dodge another invisible blast. He couldn't keep doing this. They would catch him sooner or later like they had Jack. Toxic green and flashing blue faded into existence several blocks ahead of him. He pulled out the netherite sword Ponk had made him and slashed at the creature. Its hissing silenced as it collapsed under the solid blow.

Spinning around, Fundy took stock of how many creepers were nearby. Fifteen. Maybe? He had a hard time focusing when he could barely breathe. They were all headed towards him, and he picked a sizable gap between two groups of four. But as he rushed through it, a potion splashed near his feet. The toxic green and blue disappeared, and a spicy musk and overwhelmingly sweet scent covered the creeper's gunpowder one. Fundy let out a despairing cry. His heart raced to unbelievable speeds as his legs locked into place. With a louder whimper, Fundy dropped into a crouch and covered his head. A scoff echoed through his head. As if that would do anything...

The hissing didn't bang into booms, and Fundy wasn't sent flying. Rough, edged skin drug across Fundy's jacket and snagged at the fur that stuck out of his collar and sleeves. A hard hoofed foot stepped on his tail, and his whimpers broke with a yelp. He curled into himself further even as the weight didn't allow his tail to move. The rough skin jammed into his sides and back, pinning him in place. The hissing continued invisibly through his wide eyes and despite the gasping breaths indicating where he was. His breathing got more erratic, and black dots danced across his vision.

The dancing dots soon met and grew to cover everything. The hissing faded into silence, and the rough skin stopped being rough or there at all. Darkness blotted out all Fundy's senses, and he welcomed the change as his heart popped in his chest.

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Fundy's body slumped and spilled onto the grass. Several invisible creepers trod on him, their hisses silent now that their prey was gone. A couple looked up at where Ghostbur was floating overhead. The ghost could tell by the pauses in the indents on the fallen fox hybrid's body. He waved at the invisible terrors from several blocks up in the air.

"You don't seem very worried," said an invisible voice next to his ear. Ghostbur spun around and met thin air. "Kinda like you didn't seem worried when Schlatt blew up Tubbo."

"Tommy?" Ghostbur said curiously.

"Yep," popped an affirmation from behind him. "You know ghosts don't make f\*\*\*\* sense."

Spinning around again and rotating his head, Ghostbur asked, "Are you invisible?"

"Yep," repeated the pop near his ear. A purple potion appeared beside his right eye. It lifted up slightly and then hurtled to the ground near Fundy's body. The creepers that had been fading into sight disappeared again. "Why do you get to f\*\*\*\* touch people but I can't? And why can't I f\*\*\*\* touch you? And why can't you remember anything? I remember everything! Even stuff that didn't f\*\*\*\* happen to me!"

“Toms? Do you want some blue?” Ghostbur said, holding out blue wool in the direction where the potion had been.

“No,” came the blunt reply from the other side. “I want to know why I can’t f\*\*\*\* touch you! And why you’re here!”

“To save you,” Ghostbur said, turning again to the voice. “Tubbo said you were trapped.”

“Tubbo said a lot of things,” the voice whispered harshly from above. “Now that I am thinking of it, where do you f\*\*\*\* off to? You were following us around when we were getting back here, but then you left without saying f\*\*\*\* anything like a b\*\*\*\*.”

“You were all happy. You didn’t need blue.”

“We were,” Tommy said. He stood mid-air and visible in front of Ghostbur. “We were happy. And then Snapmap came out of f\*\*\*\* nowhere and ruined it! Right after you disappeared. What did you f\*\*\*\* do?!”

“I don’t understand,” Ghostbur said with a puzzled frown. “Aren’t you trapped? Don’t you need help?”

The semi-visible ghost cackled. He bent over in half at the force of the hysterical laughter. He then straightened, firm and rigid even as the corners of his eyes glistened.

“Stay away from us,” Tommy said, hard and uncompromising. And then he disappeared. Ghostbur stayed suspended in mid-air before his lips pulled into a sharp smile.

“No, I don’t think I will.”

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Keeping her eyes closed and her ears open, Puffy remained limp where she had fallen. The hissing of creepers would have had a lesser woman shaking and panicking, but she was Captain Puffy. She wouldn't let these hissing, invisible terrors get the best of her.

She took note of their strange behavior. Creepers, visible or not, usually went for the kill, whether or not their prey was awake or aware of them. As long as they caught sight of the prey and it was close enough, they would blow. Like they had when she and Tubbo had been trying to find a way to rescue Tommy.

A shiver nearly gave her away as she remembered the Warden somehow barreling towards them as they exited the tunnel that hid the bed. Puffy had managed to dodge the assault, but Tubbo had been blown back down the tunnel. She had tried to run and get help; she could never have taken out a Warden on her own. But then the hissing had started, and she barely managed to stay conscious as she was blasted several blocks away into the ground. Unable to move, she had awaited her respawn when the hissing continued but failed to draw out and then boom. Instead square feet stepped over and around her, almost pinning her in place.

A scream came from somewhere to the left, and the footsteps and hissing increased and grew softer as they headed in that direction. Puffy refused to move as long as the sounds continued, but after a moment, she slitted her eyes open. She thought she saw a mess of toxic green and flashy blue several dozen blocks away from her, but then they disappeared again. Why weren't they exploding? They could. They had.

A beep sounded from her comm indicating a message and reminding her that she couldn't stay here on the ground observing forever. Tubbo was somewhere near a rampaging Warden. Tommy was still stuck in the barrier. Niki was somewhere on the other side of that same barrier. She had to move.

Crawling forward slowly, Puffy headed in the direction she had last seen the odd refracted gleam that appeared when the sun hit barrier blocks from the west. Her elbows scratched along the ground, and her stomach dragged and scraped through the dirt and grass. She had to save them. She had to—

Hissing sounded behind her, and she went limp. Hard, square footsteps stomped on the back of her captain's coat and exposed belly into the hard, rough ground below. She let out a

surprised cry. Another square foot stood itself next to the last on her back. She once again couldn't move. Her fingers curved into fists. She would have to wait for another distraction. She would have to wait until these weirdly behaving creepers moved away. And she would. She would wait. And she would save the kids and Niki from the Egg-Lover's clutches. She would.

She just had to wait.

---

Sapnap spun and, focusing on the odd-placed heat, slashed his netherite sword in the heat's direction. The creeper gave a sputter before dying and dropping gunpowder to the ground. Without pausing, Sapnap swung his sword in a new direction and killed another invisible menace. Where were all of them coming from? And how could they be invisible for this long?

Taking the opportunity given by the lack of hisses and abnormal heat placement, he slammed his sword into the invisible blocks instead. He had to find the opening into the barrier. It would be difficult without Tubbo, since the kid had forgotten to give him the coordinates. Once Sapnap got inside, he'd finally get to Dream. He'd corner him and force him to talk. To call all these mobs off. If anyone could do it, Dream could. Only Dream could go against a man like Technoblade's plans. This Admin-programmed mess can only be undone by another Admin. The pommel of his sword nearly bit into his palm with how hard he squeezed it. Of all the people to share his powers with, Dream had been brainwashed into sharing it with his rival. The Egg and its followers would pay for that along with everything else. Sapnap would drive his sword through the Egg's stolen face—

A hiss whistled behind him, and Sapnap swung. The hiss continued on a solid note as his sword met air. A large bang exploded into his ears and through his body. The accompanying blast propelled him sideways and slammed him back into the ground, knocking wind and liquid out of his throat. He immediately tried to stand up, but the uneven floor tripped him and soon several more hisses surrounded him. They crushed him under their hard, square feet, and more liquid sprayed out of his throat.

"Sappy!" came a familiar cry. Sapnap's vision barely focused enough to see the tall, black form on the other side of the barrier. It nearly slammed into the invisible barrier. "Are you okay? You're bleeding—"

“ $\overline{\sigma\omega\Phi} \perp \triangle \Omega \circ$ ,” warbled an unintelligible noise. Another tall, black form (or was it white?) stood next to the first and grabbed him. “ $\overline{\text{H}} \circ \Pi \circ \circ \wedge \circ \triangle \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \text{H} \triangle \times \omega \Pi \wedge \Pi \omega \times \circ \times \Pi \omega \times \}$   
 $\circ \wedge \text{H} \overline{\Phi} \circ \Pi \omega \overline{\Phi} \triangle \text{I} \wedge$ .”

“He’s bleeding! He might have internal injuries! Any of them might be seriously hurt, and they’re mobs! They might not know they’re killing them by stepping on them!”

“ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \triangle \overline{\Phi} \}$   $\triangle \times \text{I} \}$   $\circ \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \text{H} \overline{\Phi} \triangle \circ \omega$ .  $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \omega \text{H} \Omega \triangle \text{H} \omega \overline{\Phi} \circ \triangle \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \triangle \Omega \circ \Pi \}$ ,  
 $\times \omega \text{H} \omega \text{H} \perp \omega \times$ ?”

“Agh! I know that, but—but—”

“They’re all down,” said a third voice. This one had no form attached. Sapnap strained to try to connect it to a person, but his thoughts kept slipping painfully away from him. He closed his eyes, the light suddenly too bright. “Except Ghostbur. But I think he’s f\*\*\*\* distracted enough to leave us alone.”

Ghostbur? That sounded important. If only the throbbing pain would die down enough for his thoughts to remain in place.

“Are any of them critically injured?” came the first voice. He tried to lock it down. It made him mad and sad and homesick. What kind of person would do that?

“Jack’s not having the greatest time pinned to the wall by the Warden. Those f\*\*\*\* are terrifying even on our side,” said the—the third voice? It was annoyance, anger, indifference...pity? “Everyone else is completely knocked out, except Ponk who I think is trying to run back to get help. Not sure if that’ll f\*\*\*\* with the Dream and Techno’s plans. Should I go after him and scare the f\*\*\*\* out of him?”

“No, you should go get him and bring him back. Tell him we’ll call off the creepers if he takes care of the wounded. You can do that, right?” said the mad-sad-homesick voice. “Oh,

and, Tommy, language!”

[illegible]

Silence followed. Or mostly since a persistent whistle shrilly pierced it and increased the pain in Sapnap's head.

“Is that a yes or a no?” asked the mad-sad-homesick voice barely above the growing louder whistle sound.

“ $\nVdash_{\Psi}$ ,” warbled the aggravation voice.

“I think that might be a yes,” said annoyance-anger-indifference-pity voice. “But it might be a curse. You should language him just in case.”

“Neither of him are likely to curse and we have bigger problems. Go find Ponk!” said mad-sad-homesick.

“Got it. What do I do if I run into Ghostbur?” said one of the voices. It was getting hard to focus on them.

“Distract him with blue or something! Go get Ponk before someone accidentally dies!”

“Got it. I’m going, I’m going. Don’t let Ghostbur in though.”

“Wasn’t gonaatownekr.” Huh? What was that last word? Why was everything black? Did the figures come closer? How come he couldn’t—was he breathing? The eeeee-ing whistle shrilled a high enough note to block out all following thought before going painfully silent.

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Everything went down so fast, that Ponk had no idea what had happened. One moment they had all been running from a thrice-cursed Warden, and the next minute they had scattered as hisses came from all directions. He vaguely noted that the sound had started from a mound of snow that he’d barely noted the odd shape of on their right. He thought he had heard a warbling sound right before the hissing started too.

Sam, Puffy, and Tubbo had despawned during the first blasts, and Ponk had immediately planned to regroup with them to make sure both the only minor in their group and Sam were fully recovered before running back into the mess that was invisible creepers. He opened the door he had made in the snow wall to hurry over to the hidden alcove. Only after hearing another set of blasts did he realize that maybe he should stay and help take out the creatures instead. By the time he turned to try and take out as many as he could using his ears and battle sense, the only one remaining in the actual fight was Jack who was soon despawned in another set of explosions. Sapnap had left the man to fight as the blaze hybrid focused on the barrier. Ponk knew the man wasn’t in the right headspace to take charge.

A whirl of movement to his far left caught Ponk’s eye as Fundy dashed away, drawing a lot of the remaining hissing behind him. Ponk ultimately decided since most of their group had despawned, he would be of better help with his original plan. He quietly dashed towards the hidden bed alcove. He suddenly heard hissing from that direction too and remembered Jack and Fundy’s aborted attempt at desertion before.

Ponk’s center of balance shifted suddenly, and he fell face first into the snow. He tried to stand, but his feet kept being jerked to a stop. Looking down, he saw that his boots had become tangled in some wire. He frantically undid the knotted mess, ignoring the far away hisses and sudden beep from his comm. A tripped tripwire. One of them must have triggered it when walking towards the wall. He could make out one side of this string attached to a snow-covered tripwire hook. It must have been stretched over several blocks to be near unnoticeable. Would this have been what alerted the first set of creepers and that Warden? Why had they come here thinking it would be as easy to approach the barrier after what happened last time?



Shaking off the thoughts of how-could-they-be-this-stupid, Ponk heard the hissing getting warningly loud. He glanced the way of the hissing and paled. Instead of running towards the alcove, he ran as fast as possible in the opposite direction. He could easily withstand a few creeper explosions, but not when they were charged creepers. He wanted to help, but he wasn't suicidal.

The hissing faded as he managed to run far enough into the forest. Upon hearing silence, Ponk collapsed. The fall jarred his prosthetic out of his shoulder, but he automatically twisted it back into place. He took deep, calming breaths to ease his body away from its adrenaline high, but pushed himself back up to his feet to keep from completely crashing. He knew he had to get back to Kinoko and get what little help he could.

“POOOOOONK!” a yell grew louder. Ponk's head snapped up in the direction of the voice. A blur of white, red, and blond surged overhead. Tommy. How'd he get out?  
“POOOOOOOONK!”

Ponk studied the transparent ghost. The ghost boy seemed unhurt (though how one hurts a ghost, Ponk wasn't sure). Why was he looking for Ponk specifically? Why not Tubbo?

“He's looking for you.”

The sudden appearance of a second quieter voice caused Ponk to jump and turn in a circle. Ghostbur floated a few inches off the ground. The more solid ghost tilted his head.

“Wasn't he trapped?” Ghostbur asked.

“He was supposed to be,” Ponk said, glancing upwards. The screaming continued, but it grew more faint as the red, white, and blond floated away. He felt his stomach sink as he thought of one reason and one reason alone that he would regret not answering the suspicious ghost. And for that one reason, he would take the risk. “Down here!”

“Is he your friend, then?” asked Ghostbur lightly. But the question felt anything but light. Ponk didn’t answer. He kept his gaze up at the other ghost glancing around. Ponk opened his mouth to call when a beep sounded from his hip. He removed his comm and checked the message. Everything froze.

*Punz died.*

The message above it was no better. Closing his eyes, Ponk replaced the comm and stared at Ghostbur.

“Listen carefully, Ghostbur,” said Ponk, not opening his eyes. The boy ghost would head towards him soon enough. “I need you to remember this. Are you listening?”

“Of course,” Ghostbur said as seriously as the ghost ever could.

“‘We’ve lost.’ Tell that to everyone who came today if you see them. If they’re—” Ponk choked on the words. They had been completely out-manuevered. The Eggpire took few prisoners. And those few would be better off dead. The dead could go where they like. He opened his maroon eyes and fixed them on the flighty ghost. “Do you understand?”

“Tell everyone we lost?” Ghostbur half-asked half-echoed. “Why?”

“So they can run,” Ponk said.

“POOOOOOONK!” came the growingly loud cry as it barreled towards him.

“Go!” Ponk hissed. Ghostbur startled, looking between Ponk and the speeding Tommy, before turning and hurriedly floating away. Tommy rammed through Ponk and repeatedly failed to grab him.

“You f\*\*\*\* come with me!” the boy ghost demanded, finally stopping his efforts to drag Ponk physically away. Nodding as neutrally as he could, he held out his metal arm to indicate for Tommy to show him the way. The boy lit up and grabbed the metal arm. This time his hold succeeded, and he pulled Ponk in the direction the man had just run from a little too eagerly. The loosened shoulder joint popped out of place. The boy stared in horror at the disconnected arm. “F\*\*\*\*. I didn’t—You need to keep your f\*\*\*\* arm from falling off!”

The blustering yell was so Tommy that Ponk’s lips split into a large grin. Taking the arm again, he replaced it in its socket as the boy ghost sulkily floated nearby. Once it was more firmly attached, he stretched it out again. Hope wormed its way up into his chest at the wonder on the boy ghost’s face. (Was this the boy who had once ruined his lemon trees for no good reason?)

“It’s not going to f\*\*\*\* pop out again, is it?” asked Tommy, the wonder melting into suspicion. Ponk chuckled.

“No. I screwed it in properly this time.”

“You’d better have,” Tommy said with what might have been an intimidating scowl to someone who hadn’t spent a lifetime seeing patients attempt to look intimidating when they were the most hurt. Ponk merely nodded. Perhaps they weren’t as doomed as he had originally thought.

Tommy took the metal hand more gently than before and tugged carefully to lead Ponk out of the forest, and so Ponk dared to ask a question (though he doubted the boy ghost even had the honest answer).

“Where are we going?”

“To keep some b\*\*\*\* from dying. They should have listened to Dream and stayed the f\*\*\*\* away.”

So Tommy was under the impression that Dream was in charge and not the Egg. Interesting. And he was searching for Ponk for the one reason he would have regretted ignoring him for.

People were hurt and in need of a doctor. He would deal with that and then the rest could be figured out and dealt with later. Including the Egg's remaining influence. There were always the items in his inventory in case of emergency. First patients, and then he could worry about taking out the problems at their source.

## Chapter End Notes

$$\sigma_{\psi\overline{\phi}} \equiv \Delta\Omega_{\sigma^0}, - \text{Get back,}$$

ከጋቢ ሙሉ በፊት ተዘዝተው ለእነዚህ ዓላማዎች የሚያስፈልጓቸውን ነገሮች እንዲያገኙና እንዲያገለግሉ አድርገንዎታለን፡- You know they are under orders only to detain.

That's a risk they take. They came to attack us,

[illegible][illegible]

# Couldn't isn't Can't

## Chapter Summary

Dream and Techno break into the prison. This is harder for one of them than the other.

## Chapter Notes

...Better late than never? The editing's a bit rushed, but I hope the chapter's enjoyable anyway. It's been way too long.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The black building loomed over the lake. Its edges cut against the horizon, and the towers glowed dark red under the setting sun. Dream held tight to the ground below him in an effort to keep from running in the opposite direction. He squinted and tried to pick out differences between this building and—and the other one. He couldn't find anything. At least that meant their plan would work, and they didn't need extra luck to find Ant. The best case now would be for Ant to follow the others to attack their ho—their base and get detained safely.

Dream's attention was torn away from the prison at the hand pounding onto his shoulder.

“You can chicken out. I won't mention, and Chat'll get over it. Eventually.” The hand squeezed. “But I make no promises if you mess up or freeze halfway. Chat can be merciless.”

He shook his head.

“We have to get Skeppy back, or Bad—” The rest of the sentence faded. A grunt came from beside him, and the hand was replaced by a shoulder bumping into his. His mouth flickered upwards. Dream snorted, and Techno chuckled with a deeper snort of his own. He pulled his mask to the side to glare at the smug piglin.

His comm chimed, and with a huff he slid his mask on. Still staring at the piglin hybrid, he smashed a bottle of extended invis onto the floor. The odd smell mix of spice and sweet actually calmed Dream further, and he turned back to Pan—the blackstone building. He took a deep breath.

“Let’s go,” he said, running into the midst of buildings. No one was out walking on the path. Every building was shut, empty, and still covered in large cracks made by large vines. Some had half-hearted attempts at covering holes with new blocks, but overall it looked like little had been done to repair the damage. The whole area felt lifeless despite the fact that others had to have been living here. Tommy hadn’t messaged with a list of those that had come to “rescue” him, but perhaps their plan had worked perfectly and everyone was gone. No, Punz wouldn’t have allowed such a glaring error. Someone had to be guarding Skeppy. Who didn’t matter. They wouldn’t stand a chance against him and Techno.

Reaching the river next to the—the blackstone building, Dream dropped into the water and mined down. Techno swam into the gap he made, and Dream sealed the miniature, manmade cavern behind them. He then started mining forward. If the Egg had gotten ahold of Pandor—the building’s blueprints and replicated them to—to an exact—to an exact degree then—then —

A bash to his forehead knocked him backwards. He caught himself in a crouch and pushed his mask down to rub at his head, letting out a little growl. A huffing snort responded.

“Why’d you do that?” Dream grumbled in Human.

“Our invis is about the wear out, and you were staring at the wall like it was the most interesting thing while hyperventilating. Not to mention your very close friend the former egg-cult leader told me not to let you do that.”

“What did he say?”

“Gave me strict, overly precise instructions. Not sure if he thought I have no idea how to handle you or was terrified I might somehow forget breaking into the place where you experienced your worst trauma might be hard for you. I decided to go with both.”

“Bad worries too much,” Dream said, putting his pickax back to use.

“Bruh. Have you met yourself? If the former omelet cult leader does anything right, it’s worry about you. You should try it some time.”

“Worry about you? I do it all the time. Worry about everyone in the Syndicate actually,” Dream quipped back. His hand shook, but the blocks broke easily beneath the enchanted pickax.

“That’s interesting. Are you saying that we’re all officially going to be known as the Syndicate? Because I don’t remember you getting inducted.”

“What?! You guys came to me! If anything, you should consider me the Syndicate’s leader! If it weren’t for me, you would have all been Egg-fodder.”

“True, true. But, not that I take pleasure in bursting your bubble, but the Syndicate has no leader. We are a group of equally empowered individuals.”

“I hate you.”

“Great comeback. Very original. Did you get it from the former egg-cult leader?”

“You act like you’ll die if you call him by his name,” Dream muttered.

“I heard that that’s how he’s summoned.”

“He’s not the Devil.”

“Yeah. He’s only a demon.”

Lava lit the space they were in so Dream could see the piglin hybrid's slightly smug smirk. Dream flicked some lava off his pickax and in Techno's direction as the piglin skillfully dodged. Techno growled a low grunt, and Dream lifted his mask to stick out his tongue. An eyeroll later, Techno pulled a curved bottle of pink liquid and threw it at their feet.

Dream's throat tightened to shallow his breaths, but Techno grabbed his arm and dragged him into the lava before he could think about it further. The lava's heat surrounded him with warmth, and he swam up and poked his head out of the magma's flow to recover his lost air. Next to him, Techno did the same, Dream's arm clenched in his hand.

Memories bubbled up as they reached a checkpoint Dream had only been through once but had seen all too often. The lava lit up the room exactly—orangey light completely soaked up by unforgiving rough black. Dream didn't collapse. He didn't breath. He— he couldn't—

Pain erupted in his head. He dropped into a ball and covered his head as thoroughly as he could. Sir rarely went for the head, too insistent on wanting the revive book to harm Dream's—the monster's thought processes. Sir must have been in one of his angrier moods. The one that came from a lack of reply from—from someone they used to know. Dream couldn't think straight. But he had to protect his head. Sir allowed him—the monster that one mercy. Because Dream was no good to anyone with his brain scrambled. No good to anyone except Sir who would—

Softness enclosed him suddenly, from the top of his head to his sides. It was heavy and should have been unbearably hot, but it wasn't. Instead of the tepid smell of obsidian and molten rock, Dream was surrounded by earth, sweat, and something like and unlike netherwart. His whole body sunk into the softness and scent. An added pressure settled and tapped on the top of his head through the softness.

“—point out we all thought this part of your plan was dumb, but no, you insisted you'd be fiiiine.”

“...Techno?” Dream whispered.

“Oh, you're back. Want to turn around yet.”



“No.” Dream stood up and pulled his head out of Techno’s cape. “But I’m keeping this.”

A brow tilted. Techno grunted, and Dream did not squeak a squeal. His answer came out very manly and made Techno shake his head.

“You’re going to be the death of you.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Dream said standing up. He kept the cloak around his shoulders. He stared at the wall of lava separating them from the cell that had once been his torture chamber. He flinched but kept staring. “We should check the solitary confinement cell first. It’s—it’s past the lava.”

“Look, I don’t know what happened in the other place, time, whatever. But I don’t think they were dumb enough to put Skeppy in a cell that would leave that idiot unsupervised for long stretches of time. Not if they value their sanity when they ultimately have to check up on him.”

“They don’t,” Dream said, his voice wobbling into a whisper. “There’s an automatic food dispenser, and the water’s automatically filtered. They have no reason to come into the cell unless they—they—they have business with the prisoner.”

He bit his tongue, trying to get it to steady his words. A hand returned to his shoulders.

“If they wanted to use him as bait, then they wouldn’t make it so hard to get to him. There’s likely a fourth of the server’s redstone involved in getting that lava flow to stop. Would make more sense for them to have someone here defending the cell.”

“That makes sense,” Dream agreed quietly. He took another breath and cleared his throat. “The other cells are this way.” His pickaxe returned to his hand.

“Won’t we be getting mining fatigue?”

“I brought milk.”

“From where? Did you plant cows next to the potatoes?”

“No!? Where did you—Why would you—?” Dream blustered. What went through the piglin hybrid’s thick head? “Ender went out and found cows!”

“Ah. So your little minion found you some milk. Mind sharing?”

“He’s not my minion,” Dream said clearly, avoiding thinking about the darker half of the enderman hybrid. He handed Techno three buckets of milk. The guardian caught sight of them, and Dream’s arms nearly dropped the pickax. His eyes prickled at the too familiar sensation of every muscle exerting extra energy to make any movement. He reached into his inventory quickly and chugged a whole bucket of milk, splashing more than a little onto himself.

“Slow down. I have no desire to report to the others that you decided to died via drowning in milk. Not to mention you’re getting all over my cape,” Techno said before more tidily drinking his own bucket. Funny how he didn’t eat or drink anywhere close to how an actual pig did. Nether piglins generally did everything sloppily, so he’d likely been taught how to be neat from Phil. Dream gripped the edges of the bucket tight as he glanced over Techno’s shoulder towards the lava. He could bring Phil back—

The lava gave a belching pop, and Dream stared transfixed. He could see the rough patches of lava, could predict when the next sections would need to burst and sizzle. There, in that patch coming down from the left. Once it reached the bottom of the visible flow—

A large head blocked his way.

“Look. If you want to stare at the lava, you can stay here and do that. I’ll go ahead and free Skeppy and come back for you. Because, no offense, but you’re kinda slowing us down at this point.”

Dream blinked and focused on the intense red eyes of his—of Techno. Was the great Blood Warrior worried?

“I’m fine,” Dream croaked. He cringed at the hoarseness of the words and cleared his throat again. “Let’s get going.”

He turned his back on the lava and mined into the common cells’ hallway. Techno took out his own highly enchanted pickax, and as the two chugged several buckets of milk, they quickly made progress. Breaking the last block, Dream and Techno poured into the hall and immediately moved to dodge a lunge. Green eyes glowed in the redstone lamps’ light. Claws flashed as they attempted to slash Techno’s throat. Dream blocked the sharp claws with practiced ease and a netherite sword.

“Ant, we’re here to rescue Skeppy,” Dream said. The cat hybrid pushed against the sword and flipped back several blocks and back onto his feet. “And you.”

“I told you to leave me out of it,” Ant hissed. Brown ears folded into cream fur. “Guess that was never going to happen, was it?”

“You told me to get Skeppy out. I’m getting Skeppy out,” Dream said. “But I’m getting you out too.”

“I don’t want to be rescued, Dream,” Ant said. His claws raised even as his shoulders fell. “One of us needs to be here. Needs to convince the others that we—we were tricked by the Egg like everyone else. That we don’t want *it* back any more than anyone else does.”

“That’s never going to work!” Dream said, his voice rising against his wishes. “Trust me, Ant. It’s never going to work. They’ll never believe you. Please.”

“Sorry, Dream. But not all of us can live locked up in an invisible bubble.” The cat hybrid rushed him, but it wasn’t Dream who knocked him out. Techno drove the handle of his sword into the back of Ant’s skull. Ant crumbled unconscious onto the blackstone tiles.

“Well, he made his decision,” Techno said flatly. “Hopefully he’s the most dangerous thing we’ll face here.”

“He’s coming with us,” Dream said firmly. His arms trembled, so he stored his sword and drank another bucket of milk. Techno snorted, earning another glare from Dream.

“Yeah, let’s discuss how bad of an idea it is to make others’ decisions for them another time and leave it at ‘if he wants to stay, he stays.’”

“We can’t leave him here.”

“Again, we should have this discussion later when we’re not in the middle of a prison break,” Techno said. He stepped between Dream’s gaze and the fallen cat hybrid. “Which way are the main cells?”

“This way,” Dream said, turning to the left down the hall. After a moment of hesitation, Techno stepped up beside him. Dream glanced back at the form of his fallen friend. Ant was gone. Dream closed his eyes and forged forward.

Less than twenty blocks later, a sword struck into the side of Techno’s helmet. Dream instantly parried the sword as it moved to strike his legs. Grey eyes glared at him from beneath the glowing netherite blade. Dream dodged an arrow from the crossbow in the mercenary’s off hand. Two seconds later, the enchanted blade slashed towards Dream’s mask. Dream dropped under it and aimed his own ax into the hinge between the breastplate and leggings of Punz’s armor. The mercenary barely dodged when a second sword knocked against his shoulder. It should have hit his head, but Punz had tilted his body at the last second.

Dream pressed his attack, trying to push Punz back into Techno’s sword. Punz side-stepped with a grace Dream had once known well. One he still knew well. Two sudden steps and

Dream stood right in front of Punz. Punz's grey eyes widened, and his sword attempted to shove Dream aside. Dream didn't budge.

"It's over, Punz. Surrender," Dream said flatly. Punz sighed and stored his sword. The mercenary lifted his empty hands.

"I know when I'm outmatched," Punz said calmly. "Ant was crazy to try and stop you two on his own."

"If he was crazy, then what does that make you?" Techno snorted from behind Punz.

"Crazy too. But also prepared," he said, ducking and making a swift movement to stand next to a closed iron door. Two levers stuck out of the wall beside it. Techno charged, and Punz grabbed a lever. "Take another step and the prisoner dies."

Techno halted.

"Don't," Dream commanded, keeping his voice firm and steady. His hands gripped his ax harder to keep still.

"No," Punz responded evenly. "Sam and I came up with this precaution should any of you come this far into the prison. Sap thought it would be the 'former' eggperor, but we suspected it would be one of you or both. If I pull this lever, lava will fill the cell and kill its occupant. So you two are going to drop your weapons and go into the two open cells behind you. Or would you rather have the precious eggperor's 'best friend' try to swim in lava?"

"Eggperor? That's the best you can do? Not Keeper of the Undone Eldritch Breakfast or Lord Rooster, Parental Figure of a Bald Egg Cult. No. The best title you could come up with is 'eggperor,'" Techno said with a huff and feigned distress to hide the real one.

"'Eggperor' wasn't my idea. Tubbo came up with it," Punz defended. He pulled the lever a twitch lower with a shrug, and Dream switched to his crossbow. "It grows on you. Not that it

matters. I think we all know I'm skilled enough to pull this down before either of you can make a move. Walk backwards into the cells. Now."

The crossbow shakily remained pointed at Punz's heart. Dream's lungs spasmed and shook the rest of his body. He couldn't—They were normal cells and they thought he was—No. The walls were black. The lava's heat barrelled down even this corridor. He *couldn't*—But Punz would kill Skeppy and Bad would—No no nononono he couldn't—

Heaviness pressed into his shoulder, and he curled into a ball. He didn't cover any part of his body with his hands or arms. Sir would break them and then move to the protected body part. His ribcage squeezed as his heart wrestled out a beat. He clenched his teeth and forced his breathing to steady. Everything was worse when he couldn't breathe, when his teeth cut into the softer parts of his mouth. He could wait out the pain. He could ignore it. He had to.

Soft buzzing trailed along the edges of his perception, and he tried to loosen his muscles. Prepare them to bend and not break under the pain. His throat squeezed too tight, and he couldn't move. He couldn't. He couldn't. He couldn't—couldn't what? The Revive book. He couldn't let them know. Couldn't—couldn't tell Sir.

Warmth—warmer than his cell but not hotter than the lava—loomed over him. Loomed like Sir liked to, but closer. Close without pain. The Warden...?

The warmth bent towards him and touched his head even through his mask, likely to rip it off—No. It pressed against his head. Without hurting him. The action was somehow familiar. Reminded him of—of before. Before the cell. Before the plan. Before L'Manberg. Before the discs. Before Tommy—Tommy? He had a message from Tommy. On his comm. Its code was whispering to him. He hadn't heard code since—

Pink zeroes and ones enveloped the area in front of him, and his breathing matched a soothing, snorting one. Dream blinked, and Techno stood level to him breathing obnoxiously slowly and loudly. He almost pushed Techno back, but he belatedly realized that he was precariously leaned up against the large piglin hybrid. His masked forehead fully rested on Techno's ridiculously wide one.

"Back with us?"

Dream felt his cheeks heat. He quietly blinked to see past the pink and red zeroes to white and tan ones. They stood connected to the simple yet intricate string of numbers of a lever. He wondered if he could make the white and tan code—Oh. He could. And that would take care of the problem.

Mentally he calculated the risks of such a plan, but the simple yet intricate code of brown and grey with dusty red mockingly remained attached to the white and tan. They had to get Skeppy and get out before—They were lucky Punz hadn't pressed his advantage while Dream was....out. Subtly Dream reached into the world code and prepared the command.

“If you're done with the dramatics—”

The command ran.

*Punz died.*

The white and tan code was gone, and Dream rounded around Techno's looming form.

“Let's get Skeppy out of here before he wakes up to his last life and comes back to finish the job.”

“Whatever you say, man,” Techno said, following him over to the cell. Dream stood before the two identical levers. He blinked and studied the code. The lowermost lever was connected by dust red zeroes and ones to a redstone repeater that would have removed a block that held back a lave flow. The topmost merely had a dusty red trail to the door. He pulled the top lever.

“Is it feeding time already?” asked Skeppy, staring slightly blankly at the wall.

“I mean, we brought along some food,” Techno said as he moved past Dream into the open cell. “But I’d take it to go if I were you.”

“You came!” Skeppy said. He jumped off the bed he’d been swinging his legs from. He dashed and gripped Techno in a tight hug. “I thought I’d be stuck here for another year!”

“Another? You’ve been stuck here for a week and a half at most.”

“It’s been forever. Do you know how often they let me go to the so-called courtyard? Like once a day. Once a day! And it was barely ten blocks long! How am I supposed to stretch my legs in that amount of space?!”

Inside Dream’s chest, something unwound.

“Did they feed you okay?” Dream asked quietly.

“Yeah, I guess. About eight steaks a day. Gave me enough energy to run around my cell for like, half an hour.”

“I think I would have paid to see that,” Techno drawled. “Hyper Skeppy in a box. How did they not threaten to cut your supply in half?”

“They maaaaay have,” Skeppy stretched, and Dream’s lungs seized. “But Ant convinced them not too. Said trapping me in a box was bad enough. I think I’m going to have flashbacks every time someone says ‘boxed like a fish.’ It’s way too relatable now.”

“It’s going to be more relatable in a few minutes if we don’t get out of here now,” Techno said, stepping back out of the cell. Skeppy pushed past Techno and dashed out into the hall..

“I’m finally freeee!” Skeppy whooped. He spun in a circle, and a tiny smile quirked up the corner of Dream’s mouth.



“Not that your bubble isn’t shiny and everything, but we are 100% still in the prison. So save your celebrating until we’re back in the Syndicate bubble.”

“Since when are we calling it that?” asked Dream. He pulled the lever and shut the cell door.

“Since you admitted you adopted us. Now you’re stuck with us for the rest of time.”

“I said *if anything* I was the Syndicate’s leader! How does that translate to adopting all of you?”

“I mean, from what I got from Bad, you kinda did,” Skeppy inserted half sprinting, half skipping down the hall. “Which makes sense. Sappy might have been adopted first, but I swear you’re the one who takes after Bad the most.”

“Oh? So the former egg-cult leader has an adopting problem?” Techno said. He held his sword seemingly loosely in his hand, but his eyes kept scanning the hall around them and watching Skeppy carefully. Dream held his own ax tightly.

“I mean, to be honest he has a soft spot for anyone he thinks needs help. But outside of Dream and Sappy, he didn’t really adopt anyone. Phil’s definitely got him beat in the adoption department.”

Skeppy’s voice faded, and Dream tensed. Techno hummed.

“One of Phil’s worst habits honestly. I thought it was bad when Wilbur brought Tommy home and Phil was ‘okay,’ but then Phil found Tubbo on the side of the road in a box and just went ‘hey, might as well bring this kid home too.’ Not that Tubbo or Tommy stayed that long. Tommy followed Wilbur, and Tubbo followed Tommy. Phil didn’t have a problem sending them off. Said it was part of kids’ growth. Seems like the idiot that Dream got saddled with is a bit clingier.”

“Bad can be. Makes him easier to mess with sometimes,” Skeppy said with a small chuckle. “There was this one time Sappy fell from a tree—”

“Stop.” The growl stopped all of them in their tracks except Techno who dashed forward and stood between them and the shadowed form of Ant. The cat hybrid stood with an enchanted netherite sword in one hand and a glowing crossbow in the other. He lifted the crossbow slightly. “Don’t take another step.”

Dream stood still. His fingers twitched, but he curled them into his palm. No. Ant had to be on his last life. One for the clearing of the Egg. Another over the fight they had minutes ago. There had to be a way to get him out of the way without—

“Ant, I don’t know what you think is going to happen here, but it might be a better idea to play dead than push your luck,” Skeppy said from behind Techno. “Or do you really think you can take on Techno, Dream, and *me*?”

“He’s got a point. Plus we’ve got milk, man. Weakness effects will only momentarily inconvenience us. If you’re lucky,” Techno added.

“Ant, come with us,” someone said, and Dream realized it was him. He kept going. “We can get the tracker off—”

“You don’t get it, do you?” Ant hissed. “Dream, all I asked was for you to keep me out of this. If I go with you, they’re never going to believe us.”

“Believe us? What are you talking about?” Skeppy asked.

“They think all the original members of the Eggpire are beyond hope. They think we were with the Egg first, so we’ll always be with the Egg. Even when it’s gone! One of us has to try to convince them otherwise.”

“So what? You want us to knock you out to make it look authentic? Because I can do that,” Techno offered.

“No. I need you to stay and get in the cells,” Ant said. His tail was twitching, and the crossbow in his hands shook. “Maybe if they come in contact with more of us, they’ll see we’re not so bad. I’m fairly certain that they’ll let Dream out at least fairly quickly. They’ll have to dose him in water from Church Prime first, but they’ll—”

“No,” Dream said, his voice raising. His insides rattled again, but he leaned into his growing anger. “If you want to stay stuck here, then fine. Stay. Stay with the people who have you collared like a common housecat, but stay out of our way or I’ll do to you what I did to Punz.”

“Punz,” Ant said in a shaky gasp. The crossbow steadied. “What did you do Punz?”

“Took one of his canon lives,” Techno said. He shrugged. “Kinda what happens when you threaten to kill the guy we came to save.”

“Killed him? But my comm said he died. I thought—” Ant started. His tail froze. “Didn’t he—wasn’t it a glitched respawn message? Not—The death was canon?”

“It was canon,” Dream bit out. He didn’t—it had been necessary. Punz had—would understand necessary. “And the same will happen to you if you don’t leave now. And you don’t have any more canon lives to spare.”

“Neither did Punz!” Ant yelled. Everything stopped. Pain seared soft and then rough against Dream’s chest, and his vision grew dark around the edges. He—Punz—No. Punz was supposed to have all three of his canon lives. Okay, so he lost one to the Egg reset, but—but he should have two. He couldn’t—Ant had to be lying—Ant had to—

“—ill me! Get it over with! There’s no point now!” Oh, Ant was still shouting. “I was trying to convince everyone that we weren’t evil. But now Punz’s gone! And who do you think they’ll blame if I survive? They’ll say we’re working together and lock me up in this prison if not worse! And everything I’ve worked towards will be gone. Done. It’ll be like it never

happened. It'll be back to 'Ant's working for the Egg' and 'knew we shouldn't have trusted him.' Because unless I die, they'll see no reason to believe me. I'm better off dead!"

"As interesting as your diatribe was, we have to go. So if you want to die, I'll be happy to help you."

"No!" Dream jumped and dove in front of Techno. What was he doing? Ant had chosen a side, and it wasn't his. Techno stared down at him and snorted loudly. Dream couldn't help but let out a small squeal back. "Stop. I can—" His throat strangled his words. He knew what he could do. The information lay seared into the back of his brain by constant purposeful memory and pain-association. If he had paper and ink—But the explanation couldn't exit his mouth. It couldn't even get there.

"There's no fixing death, Dream," Skeppy said. He was suddenly crouched in front of Dream. Crystal hands hovered in his direction, not touching him but close. "You didn't know."

"I should have—I should have—"

"As much as you like to play the mysterious all-knowing admin, you're not really omniscient," Techno said. A hand settled on his shoulder again, but it was followed by a head quickly tapping his. "Stop trying to fool us. None of us are falling for it."

The piglin hybrid stepped in front of the diamond golem and Dream. The Orphan Obliterator gleamed.

"The diamond block's right. Death isn't something you can fix. So if you want to go about changing your mind, now's the time."

"I won't. I'm better off dead," came the certain tones of the cat hybrid. Of one of Dream's hunters. Even among all the chaos of before, he'd always managed to keep his hunters safe. His friends. They'd never lost a canon life. Not one. Why was it that now, that in this time, they'd all lost lives? That some had lost more than one....That Ant would lose all of his—

“Leave him,” Dream said, his words clipped and cold. “Let him face the consequences of his actions.”

“What!?” Ant howled. An arrow nicked Dream’s ear, and a thud echoed soon after. Techno stood over a prone Ant with one large hand wrapped around the cat hybrid’s furry throat.

“Techno! Leave him!” Dream said. He pulled out of Skeppy’s grasp (when had that happened?) and stumbled into a standing position. (Had he fallen out of one?) “I said leave him!”

Blood red eyes glinted in the odd, sickly yellow light. A grumbling snort squealed threateningly from glistening fangs. Dream squeaked a whine. The blood red eyes squinted, and Techno raised his infamous blade. The pommel smashed into the back of Ant’s head quick and hard but with less force than Dream knew the piglin was capable of.

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Techno huffed, standing over Ant’s unconscious body. Dream’s comm began to beep. “Want to check that?”

Not pulling his eyes off Techno over his hunter’s body, Dream lifted the comm and felt the code coming from it. The others were in custody. A few injured, but no one from their side. Ponk was helping them take care of those hurt. Bad had insisted on tending to the wounded—

“We have to get back now,” Dream said, dashing past Ant’s fallen form (again) and barely taking care not to step on Ant. He quickly made it to the hole they’d mined into the entry room for his—the solitary confinement cell. He could hear the two sets of heavy steps behind him.

“Been saying we should get out for a while, but mind sharing with the rest of the class why the sudden urgency?”

“The others are all down, but Bad’s insisting on tending to the wounded.”

“What?” Techno said. Dream heard his steps stutter as Dream slipped into the room they’d first entered.

“Some of them were injured, and he wants to get them the best care possible,” Dream defended. The comm beeped again, and Dream took in the message’s code. “Apparently he’s got Tommy chasing Ponk to bring him back to help.”

“I told you not to leave the soft-hearted idiot in charge.”

“I thought the Syndicate didn’t have a leader. Aren’t we all ‘equally powered individuals’? Doesn’t that mean no one’s in charge,” Dream said, pulling out the splash fire resistance and breaking it at the three sets of feet.

“You were the one who told everyone they had to listen to the former egg-cult leader,” Techno countered.

“But if I’m not the leader, then they don’t have to listen to me,” Dream nearly shouted. He grabbed Skeppy’s hand.

“Unfortunately you’ve somehow conned them all into respecting you.”

“I’m not the Egg,” Dream hotly protested as he dragged Skeppy towards the lava.

“Didn’t say you were. But I cannot understand respecting anyone respecting you after seeing you pout in your room for almost a week and nearly die of starvation.”

“I wasn’t pouting!”

“Sure, man. Call it whatever you want. If it wasn’t for Ender and Ranboo, your obituary would have been pathetic. ‘Died because he pouted himself to death.’”

“I wasn’t pou—”

“You know, if I’d known you guys would get along so great, I would have introduced you two earlier,” Skeppy piped in. Any other time, Techno and Dream would have stared at the diamond golem in disbelief, but since they were running short on time, Dream merely pushed the blue idiot into the lava. It was times like these that Dream questioned Bad’s tastes in best friends.

A short chuff later, Techno jumped into the lava, and then Dream followed. The heavy liquid warmed Dream as it did earlier, but a temptation grew for Dream to sink to the bottom and stay there until the potion effects wore off. A blue hand grasped his.

“This might not be the best time to tell you that I suck at swimming in lava. Even with fire res.”

“How? It’s not that different from swimming in water,” Techno said. The blue hand tugged Dream forward. “Though now that I think about it, it figures. You have always had trouble with lava.”

“Hey! You promised never to bring that up again,” Skeppy whined. Dream steadily swam behind the blue diamond.

“*You* promised never to bring it up again. I agreed to bring it up whenever possible. Not my fault you have so much trouble outrunning slow molten rock.”

“If anyone—”

They burst out of the lava and stumble into an obsidian room. A very familiar obsidian room. Dream instantly collapsed. He knew what he should do. He needed to turn back. They had fallen into the wrong lava. Gone the wrong way. He wasn’t—The wall was up. He was on the other side. The water basin and chest and toilet were all on the other side. It—He—He was on the—the—

Water filled his nostrils. It burned his lungs. He couldn't breathe. His world filled with code, but it blocked him. It refused to listen to him. *On his own command*. Still he scraped into it and clawed out an escape command. One that would never work. He needed out. He couldn't—couldn't do this. But the server wouldn't let him die—

The command glowed and—and it didn't flicker out. It ran. And suddenly he sat in a field of untouched snow. He tilted his head up, and a snowflake landed between his eyebrows. It was cold and real. How? How had he gotten out he—Oh. He'd run the teleportation command. And it had worked.

It worked because that prison wasn't—wasn't Pandora. He had not helped with the imitation's construction. He hadn't coded in refusal to run commands into the very obsidian. He could reach his server's code from the uncoded obsidian cell. He would never be trapped in that obsidian box. He could have also simply teleported Skeppy out of it. They didn't have to fight Ant. They didn't have to fight Pu—

A thump distracted him from his thoughts as two figures plopped onto the snow beside him. Skeppy slipped and fell on his face while Techno slid but kept himself upright. Skeppy stood and dusted himself off.

"I meant to do that," Skeppy said quickly.

"Really? And what possible reason could you have for doing that?" asked Techno

"To make Dream laugh, duh," Skeppy insisted. Dream let his mask stare at Skeppy. Obsidian eyes rolled. "Besides you could have warned me you were going to do that."

"Nah. Only losers need warnings," Techno said. "Look at me. It only took me a moment to trace this idiot's command and copy it. There's nothing quite like learning complex coding in the middle of a searing hot prison cell."

Dream snorted. Techno grumbled and growled a grunt back.



“Huh. I didn’t know that anyone but Bad bothered to learn Piglin. Good on you for learning how to understand that mess of sounds, Dream,” Skeppy said. Techno and Dream exchanged glances, and Dream squealed lowly. Techno chuffed. “Any chance Bad already lectured you about how rude it is to talk when other people can’t understand? Because if not I can have him do it when we go back.”

“Niki’s usually the one reminding us about that,” Dream said off handedly. “Might as well go back the fast way now that we know it works.”

“Yeah. About that. Any reason we didn’t do that in the first place?”

“If I had known for sure it would have worked, we would have.”

“And you didn’t because?”

“I thought the Egg made it an exact replica and forgot that it didn’t have Admin abilities.”

“You forgot?” Techno drawled. He snorted and continued, “No, yeah, I can see how you did that. It’s not like the undone breakfast food nearly tore you and us apart to try to get those powers. It definitely didn’t infect Phil on a basic code level in order to try to get to Phil and then you when that didn’t work on account of Phil transferring his powers to me. Obviously the fetal poultry could code the whole time.”

“Hold on. You have Admin powers?” Skeppy interrupted.

“You’re only catching onto this now?”

“I mean, yeah. A mod can use the remnants of his Admin’s power to teleport. That’s what I thought you did, not actually used your own power to do it. How’s that fair? Do you know

what I had to do for anyone to consider sharing their Admin power with me?” asked Skeppy. Techno turned a flat look onto him.

“I’m still surprised anyone was crazy enough to agree, even temporarily.”

“Hey! It turned out to be a good idea on his part!”

“Aren’t you banned from that server?”

“Shut up,” Skeppy snapped, and Dream had to purse his lips together tightly to keep from laughing. They had more important issues to deal with at the moment.

“Enough. We have to return before—before the others do something to Bad or—or any of us.”

“Then get us there,” said Techno. “Coordinates are still giving me trouble.”

“Fine,” Dream said. His hand dove into the code, and the command appeared near instantaneously. Seconds later, they were at the edge of the barrier. Skeppy lost his balance and fell on an unconscious Sam. Techno stepped sideways and forward to save himself from the same fate. Dream huffed a disappointed squeak. Techno grunted low and smug, and Dream turned away to find where the others were.

“Tommy, bring another one of those regen potions. Fundy has a skull fractured, likely from the constant trampling under multiple feet.”

His gaze locked onto the source of the command. Ponk stood over the prone form of the local fox hybrid. Fundy’s head didn’t pour out blood, but a trail leaked out a folded-back ear. Tommy rushed towards the barrier but stopped when he spotted Dream.

“You’re back!” Tommy yelled. Ponk’s head swiveled away from Fundy to swivel towards Dream. A red and white shirt blocked the conflicted look on the doctor’s face. “Finished making the new bedrock crater already?”

“Didn’t get around to that part,” Techno said from right beside Dream’s shoulder. “We ran into some trouble and then the overgrown squealer here got nervous because the former egg-cult leader is healing the idiots who attacked us.”

“Overgrown squealer?” Tommy asked, floating and spinning upside down. He looked between Skeppy and Dream. Techno snorted and pointed to Dream.

“Why are you pointing at me?” Dream asked in a low voice. Tommy’s eyes widened, and then the ghost started barking out laughing.

“He called....he called...you a...f\*\*\*\*\* squealer...,” Tommy chuckled out between huffs of hysterical laughter.

“You called me what?!” Dream said.

“You heard me,” said Techno slowly. “If you want me to stop, stop sounding like an overgrown piglet every time you speak my native tongue.”

“I do not sound like a piglet!” Dream shouted. “Don’t call me that!”

“Even if I didn’t, it wouldn’t change the truth,” Techno said with a smirk and crossed arms.

“Are you both serious right now?” came a voice behind Techno. The two instantly flinched and faced Niki. “If you still have that much energy after breaking someone out of prison, why don’t you go and help bring out potions and food for the injured? Oh, and Skeppy, nice to have you back.”

“Nice to be back,” Skeppy said with a wide silly smile. “Can I help too?”

“Depends. On a scale from one to ten, how much do you think Bad will throw a fit if one of us doesn’t take you to a guest room and make you rest?”

“...a ten?”

“Then Ran—no, sorry, Ender can take you to the room you were using, and you rest until Bad can go check on you,” said Niki.

“Gotcha,” Skeppy said. The diamond golem jumped when the enderman hybrid popped up behind him as if waiting for an unseen signal. Ender vaguely locked eyes with Dream before striding to the house. Something about the line of the enderman hybrid’s back had Dream running to catch up to him. He checked behind him to see Techno and Skeppy following them while Tommy floated the quick way through the barrier as if it wasn’t there.

Dream opened his mouth to talk to the enderman hybrid but a shrill sound interrupted him. Niki was screaming.

Sapnap stood behind her with a sword plunged through her shoulder. The scream cut off, and Niki summoned her own sword to her uninjured. Her sword swing was aborted as Sapnap twisted the sword. Niki let out another cry as her sword dropped from her hand. An arrow bolt appeared in Sapnap’s collarbone, causing him to let his sword go to instinctively check for damage. Niki fell forward but Techno caught her before she hit the ground. Dream stood between them and the bleeding Sapnap.

“There you are,” Sapnap said. An ax fell out of his inventory and into the hand not holding his bleeding collar. “Knew if I hit one of your ‘new team,’ you’d come out of the woodwork.”

“Sappy, stop this. Please,” said Bad from where he stood next to Ponk. The crossbow in his hand tilted down slightly. “Please, just listen—”

“I’m done listening to you!” Sapnap spat. “To all of you! You all say the same things. ‘We’re not brainwashed. We just want you to go away. We’re no longer friends for no good f\*\*\*\*\* reason.’ And you—” His trembling ax pointed at Bad, his eyes half glazed. “This is all your fault! If you had left that stupid Egg alone! Even now, you’re letting it use you to sweet talk people into falling for its—its lies. Sure, the Egg’ll give us everything we want. We’ll be happy if only we listen to it. Everything—everything will go back to—to what it was supposed to be. F\*\*\*\*\* that. Nothing—nothing’s going to go back to the way it was. No matter how hard I try. No matter what I do, nothing—we’re never going back to the way we were, are we?”

The ax fell from a loosening grip. Brown, glazed eyes swam.

“What happened?” Sapnap squeezed out as he stumbled towards Dream. “What did—what did we do? I don’t—I don’t get it. The Dream I knew—he wouldn’t have walked away from us and never come back. He wouldn’t have locked himself away.” The bleeding blaze hybrid fell into Dream’s chest and let out one more quiet wail. “Why?”

Dream’s chest hurt. His eyes burned. Everything—everything was too much. He wanted—his hand slipped back into the code. The command formed. He went to push it to run.

A snuffle next to his heart stopped him. Sapnap hated crying. He never did it where anyone could see. Too proud. Too convinced that he had to prove he wasn’t the weak one despite being the youngest of the three. He hadn’t cried once since Dream established this server. He’d yelled and fought and threatened. But he’d never cried. And now he was—

“I can’t,” Dream whispered. “Sap, I can’t. I’m—I’m sorry.”

He erased the command and ran a different one. Sapnap slumped and fell sideways. Dream caught him and lowered the blaze hybrid to the ground. He didn’t look up, didn’t want to see any of the others’ reactions. The frustrated huff from behind him was enough. He’d have to tell them about Punz. This would seem mild in comparison. They’d—They wouldn’t be more disappointed. But not now. He couldn’t—not now.

“Bad?” he gasped out. Dark hands slipped into his vision. The demon’s face followed. “Take care of him?”

“Of course,” Bad muttered. The hands gently cupped his shoulders. “And you too, muffinhead.”

“Oh,” Dream said, falling forward. As Sapnap had. Sniffing and crying into his chest. After stabbing Niki. After imprisoning Skeppy. After using the remade P—the prison. No. Dream couldn’t. But maybe he didn’t have to. He let his thoughts fade as he felt himself leaning into stronger arms.

## Chapter End Notes

I refuse to let the next update take as long. Hopefully.

# Down Another Stream

## Chapter Summary

Skeppy would very much like to know what is going on, and Niki would like to help people without getting stabbed.

## Chapter Notes

A huge thanks to Ayonne for betaing this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Skeppy learned two things from his time in prison: one, he never ever *ever* wanted to be locked up in a small room again; and two, that prison messed up Dream badly. Which didn't make sense since the building hadn't been made until after the Egg had taken over most of the server and Dream had been hiding up in this mountain base for months before that. Why did simply *being* in that prison nearly break him? Now that he was awake and rested, Skeppy was going to find out.

And then there was that one other thing he'd found out before being locked up he needed to share, but he had priorities. Dream first, vague weirdness from the people who locked him up later.

The diamond golem slipped out of the bed and into the hall. This place was surprisingly huge, almost as huge as his and Bad's original mansion. And it was supposedly made by Dream of all people. Which was weird because for all his talents, Dream had never seemed much interested in building. Neither had Sappy. Both had more combat-suited personalities and talents which Skeppy had more than encouraged even if it burned down more than one of Bad's builds. Sappy had trouble controlling his fire powers during spars.

A tiny body wooshed past him in the hall, and he automatically reached down and caught the kid by the back of his shirt. Niki turned the corner, her face lighting up once she caught sight of the kid in Skeppy's grasp.

“Thanks! He slipped past me when I brought him and Ranboo lunch,” she said, bending down and snatching the kid up in her arms. He vaguely noted bandages under her shirt (the image of a sword through that area vaguely popped up in his memory) before realizing that the kid she was holding was a tiny piglin. Yes, that made more sense. It couldn’t have been a tiny humanoid brunet. “Peace! You have to stay with Ranboo for now! You know that.”

“Need ta find Papa!” the kid whined. Oh, this was Dream’s kid. The one Skeppy had seen around some before deciding to go try to talk to Sappy. What a terrible idea that had turned out to be. Um...wasn’t he trying to do something when he came out here?

“Oh, Pea,” Niki mumbled. She rested her forehead on the kid’s head not unlike the way Skeppy had seen all of the Syndicate do to each other. Some sort of piglin thing. Did Technoblade teach them that? “Your papa’s resting. We’ll bring you straight to him once he’s better, okay?”

“Papa lock away? No let no one in?” the kid squealed.

“No! No, nothing like that,” Niki quickly said. What was the kid talking about? Why did Niki’s words sound so urgent? “He’s...sleeping. Bad’s keeping an eye on him. But there’s...some ba—angry? No, let’s go with confused people a little too close to here, and we don’t want them seeing you.”

“Bad man yelling from outside no-red wall?”

“One of them is the man who yelled from the other side of the barrier, yes,” Niki agreed. “So you have to stay with Ranboo and Ender.”

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“No! No bath!” the kid shrieked in a squeal. Skeppy covered his ears, but he couldn’t stop the vibrations from bouncing around in his body.

“Ender! Don’t scare him like that!” Niki scolded, rocking the kid to calm the loud squeals. Bad rounded the corner opposite the one Niki had come from at near full speed.

“What’s wrong with Peace!?” he said, quickly moving to scoop the kid out of the Niki’s arms. He gave the freakishly tall kid his patented disappointed glare. Skeppy was all-too-familiar with that one. “Ender, what did you do?”

“ $\Xi\psi\wedge\psi\psi\psi\{\overline{\Phi}\ominus\overline{\Phi}\triangle\circ\psi\triangle\equiv\triangle\overline{\Phi}\Xi$ ,” the enderman hybrid warbled. Bad’s glare faltered, and he glanced over at Niki.

“He was trying to give Peace a bath. Too bad our Peace takes after his dad and is a master escape artist. And then Peace decided it would be best if he tried to find his Papa while he was running away from proper hygiene,” Niki said. Bad hummed and turned his attention back to the enderman hybrid.

“I see,” Bad finally said to the twitching teen. He grinned. “I appreciate the help, Ender. Do you...want some help?”

The teen hissed and then slumped into a less tense posture. He then fidgeted with his fingers and sheepishly smiled.

“Ender’s decided that I would be better at giving Peace a bath,” the same enderman hybrid mumbled. Oh right. There were two of them. Or one guy that was made up of two. Something like that. Skeppy was starting to get annoyed that Bad hadn’t even noticed him.

“Oookay. If he says so,” Bad shrugged, still not even looking sideways at Skeppy. Skeppy got that when he finally got back, things happened. People got stabbed, so Bad couldn’t give him the once over. But there wasn’t anything serious happening now! “Peace, go with Ranboo and take a bath, and then he’ll bring you to where your papa’s resting. Sound good?”

A low, whining squeal erupted from the kid piglin, and Skeppy covered his ears uselessly again. This kid's vocal cords had to be reaching for frequencies specifically aimed to cause a diamond golem the most pain. Bad shushed the child and rocked him with practiced ease, and Skeppy vaguely remembered similar scenes when Sappy was tiny. He vaguely remembered deciding that travel to various servers sounded like a good idea. Mostly to gain experience, but also to avoid the high-pitched wails. This kid hadn't made noises like this before Skeppy had been locked up in that torturously tiny cell, had he? Not that Skeppy had been around the kid much. Dream had taken after Bad there, being way too overprotective of the small piglin.

“Nononono! Papa! Enner! Come back!” the small piglin kid wailed. Skeppy could swear his facets were cracking. “Peace bath! Come back!”

“Sshhh. Ssshh. Ender’s gonna come back,” Bad soothed. He shot a heated warning glare at the duo-person-teen-guy. “Right now.”

The enderman hybrid straightened and crossed his arms. “ $\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq_{\Psi} U i \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} U w \circlearrowright x y i z$   $U \Pi$   
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 $\neq A \neq A$   $A$   $U i \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} U w \overline{\Phi}$   $\square\square$   $h \Pi \in \sqsubseteq.$ ”

“See!?” Bad said ignoring the hissing teen as much as he had Skeppy this whole time.  
“Ender’s back! You’re going to be good for him now, aren’t you?”

“Peace take bath and Ender stay?” the small piglin kid sniffled.

“Uh huh,” Bad said, his voice entering into higher-pitch, baby-talk territory. At least it wasn’t grating. “Ender’ll stay if you let him give you a bath.”

The sniffing piglin kid rubbed his eyes, and the tears that had been streaming down the fuzzy pink cheeks trickled to nothing. Tiny, stubby arms reached out for the tall teen who reluctantly took the child into his arms.



talking about.

“So far, so good,” Niki said. “I was coming in for more supplies actually when I saw Peace running without supervision through the halls. Didn’t want him finding his way outside where the more conscious patients could see him.”

“Some of them have woken up?” Bad asked.

“A few of them. Almost half actually. Ponk’s convinced them to stay put, but a few of them are getting restless.”

“We need to send something to reassure them and see if we can keep them here. Given what Techno said about the break-out, it’s better if they don’t go back just yet.”

“They know Punz is dead,” Niki said blandly. “The only danger is having them learn how he died. And maybe them getting their hands on Ant.”

“That muffinhead should have come back with the others.”

“He made his choice.” Niki crossed her arms. “He’s lucky Tech didn’t take his last life.”

Bad sighed, and Skeppy took it as his cue.

“He nearly did at the end there. Dream basically had to beg for his life. Honestly surprised that worked. I’ve seen the Blade in one of his blood rages, and I didn’t think anyone could stop him when he really gets going.”

“You don’t know Techno that well then,” Niki said with uncalled for irritation. What? He’d been honest. Also provided important info. Technoblade didn’t go into a rage without reason, and apparently shooting at Dream was a good enough reason. But then maybe shooting at anyone here except Bad got that response? Skeppy decided not to leave Bad alone with

Technoblade. Bad wouldn't attack, but if Techno got it in his head that Bad was a real threat....

"He didn't mean it like that," Bad said, hands up. Bad always understood what Skeppy meant. And he was overall better with words anyway. "And he's known Techno for longer than most of us. Sure, they haven't talked all that much outside of the battlefield talk, competitions, and trolling, but Skeppy's not as dumb as he looks—"

"Hey!"

"—he knows how Techno is. And if not, he'll figure it out quick. For now, how about you take Tommy and Techno and that armor I enchanted for you and give Ponk's patients some of your baking?"

"Do we keep your muffins?" asked Niki.

"I don't think they'll eat anything I make," Bad said. His sharp fingers picked at the ends of his cloak closest to them. His face twisted in frowning disgust. "I hate to sacrifice your cake to them."

"We'll keep the cake then," said Niki. The woman's smile brightened and would have started sparkling if possible. Bad had that effect on people. Then she looked at him and narrowed her eyes. Fair. Skeppy had that effect on people. "We went through a lot of trouble to get you out of those idiots' clutches. Especially Dream and Techno. Don't do anything to jeopardize their efforts. Understood?"

"Loud and clear, ma'am," Skeppy said, saluting in the most exaggerated way possible. She scowled, sighed, and shrugged at almost the exact time. Not a bad response overall.

"I'll keep him out of trouble," Bad backed him. Boy, he'd missed that.

"Sure. Maybe in doing so you'll keep yourself out of trouble too," Niki said.

“I stay out of trouble!”

“Sure you do,” Niki said with her smile returning. “As if Dream doesn’t come by his trouble-finding tendencies honestly.”

“I’ve always taught him how to get out of trouble, not into it!”

“That’s because you obviously led him into the trouble that he needed teaching to get out of.”

“That muffinhead found the trouble on his own!”

“So you’re saying you lead by example then?” the woman chuckled. Bad growled and then groaned.

“I’m starting to think maybe we should offer Ponk’s patients some muffins after all,” Bad said in a grumble.

“No!” Skeppy shouted, inserting himself back into the conversation. “I haven’t had a muffin in months, Bad! Months! You can’t offer them muffins before I’ve even had one! You wouldn’t let them deprive me of more than they already have, would you?”

Bad grumbled unintelligibly. “Fine. Let’s get you muffins.”

“YES!” Skeppy yelled, grabbing Bad by the hand and trying to drag him in the direction the diamond golem vaguely remembered the kitchen was. Bad didn’t budge; his stance and weight was too much for Skeppy to pull.

“You won’t go out without Techno and Tommy and the armor, right?” Bad mother-henned. Niki giggled.

“I won’t if you make sure that he doesn’t eat all the muffins.”

“Don’t worry. Even if he does, I’ll make some more. Cinnamon swirl?”

“I still need to get the recipe for those,” the woman hummed. “They’re near perfect. I think the balance of the sweet and cinnamon is ever so slightly off, but...yeah, if you make those, I’ll make sure to wear the full set of netherite armor, take Tommy and Techno with me, and even hold onto the full stack of golden apples Techno pushed on me. I swear no one would think you were horrible villains if they saw what a bunch of motherhens you are.”

“I know, right?” Skeppy added. The woman stared at him puzzled before shaking her head.

“Right. Time to get going then,” Niki said, going back the way she came from. She threw a last comment over her shoulder. “Stay inside!”

“Now who’s being a motherhen,” Bad said fondly. He pulled his attention from the woman and looked back down to Skeppy. “Let’s get you some muffins, you muffinhead.”

“Muffins!” Skeppy said louder than he intended. Okay, so maybe getting ignored by Bad was starting to wear on him. Even with everyone in the Badlands, Skeppy rarely had to fight for Bad’s attention. If he wanted Bad’s attention, he got it. Bad usually took care of business while Skeppy was busy exploring or napping or whatever.

The kitchen was not in the direction that Skeppy had started to drag Bad in, but it wasn’t that far off. Once they got there, Bad directed him to a large pile of muffins (someone was stress-baking again) before leaving him in front of them while placing several different baked items in a strange red box.

“Wha’re dose?” Skeppy mumbled around the muffin in his mouth. The cinnamon prickled pleasantly on his tongue and gelled perfectly with the sweet warmth.

“Niki’s bread and quiches. I think she made a couple of meat pies in here too,” Bad said distractedly. That wouldn’t do. Grabbing another muffin, Skeppy marched over to him and plucked a bread roll out of his best friend’s hand. “No! Give that back you muffinhead!”

“I waddled ‘oo dry one!” Skeppy said. He swallowed the current mouthful of muffin and stuck the roll in his mouth. Bad growled again but then kept stuffing more baked goods in the red box. What was Skeppy doing wrong? Maybe the direct approach? “Baaaaad. Pay attention to me! I’ve been gone for weeeeeeeks. Didn’t you miss me?”

“I missed you loads. Didn’t you see all the muffins I baked?” Bad said freeing one hand from the packing to wave at the muffin mountain. “I just....” He breathed and closed his eyes. Opening them, he turned to Skeppy fully. “I have to make sure Niki has what she needs before she goes back out there. And then I have to go back to monitoring Dream. He’s been out for longer than you and—and the last time he was like that, it...He needs someone there when he wakes up, okay? We’ll do something just the two of us once everything calms down. I promise.”

“Bad, last time you promised me we’d hang out, you found an oval-shaped virus and got a bit distracted. So excuse me if I’m not so quick to believe you,” Skeppy said. He inwardly winced, already regretting striking so low. Bad wilted, and he almost took the words back. Almost. But he had his eyes on the prize now. “Besides I don’t get it. You’ve never been as mother-henny with Dream as you were with Sappy. Always said Dream didn’t need it. The kid couldn’t have changed that much in what...a year?”

Bad’s hands that hadn’t stopped packing Niki’s bread and pastries into the box paused. The demon’s slumped form straightened and stared at Skeppy.

“Skeppy...what—” Bad started and stopped. He tilted his head and then sighed. “This is about what happened to Dream, isn’t it?”

“Can’t you just tell me?” Skeppy said, changing his approach again. He didn’t get it. Bad was his best friend. Usually Skeppy could read him like a coloring book and play him like a fiddle. But no matter what he tried, Bad wouldn’t budge on whatever was behind Dream’s secret change.



All he'd gotten out of Dream was a brief history of the server from his point of view, which yeah, made sense. But it didn't fully explain how Dream had gone from slightly enigmatic but still sweet, caring kid to full-on enigma that almost let the whole server burn. Schlatt's death definitely didn't make sense as a motive. No one cared for Schlatt, for all that Bad tried to give him a funeral. Okay, so maybe Quackity, but even he had turned on the goat hybrid in the end. And that was another thing. Quackity was dead. And with all the scrambled memories the Egg left, no one knew what happened to him. The few pieces they'd been able to put together from oooold server messages was that *Techno* had killed him. Which didn't make sense since Techno had helped Quackity against the Egg at the banquet. So what the f\*\*\*\* happened between them.

The only people on the whole server who had the fullest picture of what happened during the Egg's reign all lived in this house. But they'd only answered a couple of Skeppy's questions. Or rather Techno had. Everyone else seemed to be wary of him. Which didn't make sense given how welcoming they were of Bad. If they trusted Bad—okay, so not Techno but that pig was precaution and paranoia melded together—why not him? How did *he* come across as less trustworthy than Bad?

And why did even Techno shut him down when anything about Dream came up!? Did they think he was an idiot? Something weird happened to Dream. The kid shouldn't be having panic attacks so bad he reverts to tiny him's bad habit of teleporting himself out of situations. The kid had grown out of that when he'd met George!

“Skeppy, I can't—”

“You can't tell me because it's Dream's story to tell. Yadda yadda yadda. I get it. You guys don't trust me! They don't want me here! The only reason Dream rescued me was because he didn't want you coming after me or getting hurt!” Skeppy spewed, barely hearing what he was saying. “I'm barely a second thought here! Your guys barely tolerate me. You think I didn't notice that before I left? It's why I left. Sappy needs me more than you and these guys do, but he doesn't—doesn't want me either....”

Arms wrapped around Skeppy's shoulders, and the diamond golem realized that they were shaking. The muffin in his hand smooshed to crumbs between him and his best friend in any world.

“We want you, Skeppy,” Bad whispered, fitting his head perfectly on top of Skeppy’s. “*I* want you. The others—they’re just a bit jumpy around newcomers. They like you. They do. They were all gungho to rescue you, and you can’t say it was all for me when one of the masterminds was Techno. You’ve known that muffin for way longer than me or Dream. And he was less stressed with you here, even with the whole Sappy trying to break-in thing.”

A tail coiled loosely around Skeppy’s feet and tapped at them.

“...it was bad, wasn’t it?”

“The room was so small,” Skeppy said, letting the muffin crumble between them and using both hands to hold onto his tall demon friend. “The courtyard was so small. Everything was so small. It reminded me—the storage room—”

“It wasn’t a storage room,” Bad whispered, somehow pulling him closer. The cinnamon scent tickled his nose along with Bad’s natural sulfur. The storage room was far behind him.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean—”

“It’s okay. I know,” Bad said. “I’m just happy you told me.”

Bad meant that. Skeppy knew. That’s why he was Skeppy’s best friend. Skeppy snuggled deeper into Bad’s hold.

“I’m still not telling you Dream’s secrets.”

“D\*\*\*\* it,” Skeppy said.

“Language!” Bad screeched. The familiar reverberations vibrated through Skeppy and made him smile. Skeppy chuckled, but the mirth trailed away.

“Do you think he’ll ever feel comfortable enough to tell me?” Skeppy asked. Bad hummed and shrugged.

“That’s up to him. You should be patient with him for now.”

“But I’m bad at being patient,” Skeppy whined. Bad pulled away, and his grin crumpled into a frown.

“You’ve got crumbs everywhere,” Bad said. He grabbed a nearby kitchen towel and wiped at Skeppy’s face. Skeppy endured his best friend’s fussing as he cleaned them both up. Once the demon was done, he sighed. “Want to help me keep an eye on Dream until he wakes up?”

“Can I get more muffins?”

“Fine. You can get more muffins,” Bad huffed. He stuttered to a stop and then looked back at the red box. “*Or* you can go with Niki, Tommy, and Techno to deliver the food.”

“You want me to deliver food to the people who locked me away?”

“No. I want you to take food to Sapnap. If you go with them, then I know Techno won’t kill him on sight. He almost did after Dream passed out, but I managed to talk him out of it.”

“Right after you shot him?” Skeppy asked. Bad stared at him, and Skeppy conceded the question was pointless.

“I didn’t mean—”

“No. Sorry. I get it. No giving up on Sappy. Not yet.”

“And Techno could use an old friend,” Bad added. Always thinking too many steps ahead. But that thought process had kept Skeppy from accidentally killing himself for good on more than on server. So he couldn’t complain. Too much.

“Do not worry, commander. I have read your messages and will perform my duties to the best of my abilities. Which I may add, are awesome!”

Bad rolled his eyes. Another small success. The demon handed Skeppy the strange red box.

“Take this to Niki, you absolute muffinhead.”

Skeppy took the box and stored it. He then glomped onto Bad’s waist and looked up as sparkly as possible at Bad.

“I’m still getting more muffins, riiiiight?”

“Ugh. Of course, Skeppy. Now get going and give Niki the box! And take some food for back-up, okay?”

“Yay! Future muffins!” Skeppy bounced back to his standing position. He swiped several of the non-muffin baked goods. “Got a sword?”

“Yes. Why?” Bad asked as he pulled his familiar enchanted blade out. Skeppy took Language out of Bad’s hand and swung it around.

“Because I’m not going back out to face those people without a weapon. Armor’d be nice too.”

Bad grumbled, but he pulled out his own personal set. The enchantments did their magic and shrunk the set to Skeppy's size. All the pieces felt as perfect as usual.

"I want that back, Skeppy," Bad warned. It's like he didn't trust him. So maybe he'd lost a few things Bad had given him. Those were gifts. These were loans. Bad would get them back. Probably.

Niki walked into the kitchen before Skeppy could fully figure out what comeback would anger Bad the most. She had her own personalized set of Bad-enchanted armor on, and Skeppy vaguely felt a little bad about how many armor pieces from Bad he'd lost.

"Are you coming with us?" asked Niki.

"Yep," Skeppy said with a small bounce. "Bad said you might need an extra pair of hands."

"We'd certainly appreciate it," Niki nodded. "Where are the supplies?"

"Here," Bad said, handing her a stack of bread. She gave him a wide smile.

"I see you've been trying my recipes."

"Even I get tired of muffins all the time," Bad said with his own small smile.

"Hard to believe with the stack on your kitchen counter," Techno interrupted as he strode into the room like the lowkey show-off he was. "So are we ready to go or not? Because leaving one person to corral the idiots outside seems like a punishment fit for someone way worse than the doc out there now."

"Techno's right. Let's go," Niki said. She stepped forward and tilted her head up. Bad sighed a chuckle and tapped his forehead against hers.

“You’ll stay safe?”

“You’re sending the cavalry and the infantry with me. I’ll be fine.”

“Some would call it overkill, but they’ve obviously never met this bunch,” Techno said. He took Niki’s hand and gently pulled her away from Bad. Skeppy narrowed his eyes. He hadn’t liked Techno’s attitude when it came to Bad, but he’d kept his mouth shut. Because he’d understood why the piglin acted like that; Techno was beyond paranoid. But if this was going to continue, then—

With a gruff chuff, Techno knocked Bad’s head hard with his own. Bad instantly rubbed the site of the blow, but he also stared at Techno with wide, white eyes.

“So, are we going or not?” Techno said moving towards the kitchen door and away from the gaping Bad. Skeppy himself wasn’t sure if he should point and laugh or make sure his best friend could still function after that shock. Niki made the decision for him as she grabbed his arm and dragged him after Techno. The woman was wearing a smile that cut across her face almost painfully.

“Come back safe!” Bad called after them. Techno grumbled, and Niki called back a quick yes.

Skeppy wondered what he’d have to do to earn a headbutt like that.

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Niki couldn’t stop smiling. Sure, she had to deal with idiots soon enough. But *her* idiots were all safe and getting along. Plus she had no doubt that Bad would have an extra special batch of muffins for them when they got back. Especially since Techno would finally be openly eating one (he hadn’t been sneaky enough for her not to notice him snatching a couple when he thought no one was looking).

“What’s with the face? Did Dream wake up and finally open up about all the trauma he got in that prison?” Tommy asked as he floated right in front of her face. She stared at him cross-eyed for a second before rolling her eyes.

“What trauma? I’m the one who got locked up,” Skeppy asked in a whine.

“Right. I keep forgetting you don’t know,” Tommy said, floating over Skeppy’s head. For someone who complained about being a ghost almost constantly, he sure took advantage of his ghostly powers.

“Exactly! I know I’m missing something, but Bad won’t tell me what. It’s been driving me crazy!”

“When the overgrown squealer finally gets around to trusting you, he’ll tell you,” Techno added. Huh. Guess that nickname was staying. She’d feel worse for Dream, but honestly that man needed more needling to get over himself, not less.

“But I want to know now,” Skeppy said.

“Look, it took us months and the stupid red mass of evil to get him to tell us anything,” Niki added as they reached the barrier. Tommy floated half-in and half-out of the invisible wall somehow. “Your best friend got some kind of fast pass, but you’ll simply have to be patient like the rest of us.”

“If Bad got a pass, I should get one too. I’ve known him almost as long,” Skeppy said. A week into his last visit, Niki had realized where Bad’s near endless patience came from. The thought was reaffirming itself as the diamond golem kept slumping into crossing his arms. “Sappy would have told me.”

“‘Sappy’ also stabbed an defenseless woman, who was playing saint and helping heal her enemies, to try to get his former best friend’s attention,” Techno scoffed as he tapped at a barrier block.

“Excuse you?” Niki said, rounding on him.

“Right. I meant unarmed,” Techno said without any mockery. Niki nodded.

“Stabbing an unarmed opponent wasn’t...great,” Skeppy winced. “But then he thinks you tortured Ghostbur so—”

“You’ve seen Wilbur?” asked Techno.

“Yeah. Back in Kinoko. From the sounds of it, he’s been hanging about there and specifically around Sappy for a while. Told Sappy you’d done...something. Sappy refused to go into detail, said I had to know what since I was part of it even though I hadn’t seen Ghostbur since the Egg—”

“Why would Ghostbur say that?” Tommy asked. The last of the three block thick barrier pixelating away.

“That’s what I want to know,” Techno muttered, and Niki’s focus went entirely on him. His chin was tucked into his chest, and his eyes were flaring along with his nostrils. “Last time we talked, he was rambling weirdly about how Phil might have been warning me about Dream or wanting me to give Dream a chance. He wasn’t super clear, but after what I learned after Dream left, I knew Phil was telling me to trust Dream. Wilbur did mutter something about the former e—Halo being the undone omelet’s gateway to the rest of us and the most vulnerable to any remnant code. But I’ve gone over the guy’s code several times since, and there’s no red viral code in it.”

“Still took you a long time to warm up to him,” Niki said, a smile curling her lips again at the memory of the kitchen.

“He still gave the undone omelet its first foothold onto the server. And the guy’s always put me on edge for some reason.”



“That’s because Bad’s a secret b\*\*\*\*\* when he wants to be. Who do you think Dream lost the most of his manhunts too?” Skeppy asked. She had to get a record of these manhunts. They obviously had some fu—vital information in them.

“Those were f\*\*\*\*\* lucky shots!” Tommy said zooming in front of Skeppy. “If Dream had seen them coming, he would have blocked them easily.”

“But he didn’t, did he?” Skeppy said smugly. They passed the barrier, and Techno replaced the blocks. His gaze was distant, so Niki kept half an eye on him. Tommy started to say something when another voice cut in.

“Finally! Do you know how hard it was to get this lot to stay in place?” asked Ponk, tiredly walking towards them from the front of a small, hastily put-together wooden building. “They are very uncomfortable staying so close to your guys' base.”

“Want some mobs to keep them in order?” asked Techno, his smile very filled with teeth. Niki kept herself from rolling her eyes and ruining his effect. Not that Ponk would have noticed with how the doctor scrambled backwards.

“No thank you.” Niki was slightly impressed the doctor managed to keep his words steady. But then Ponk had done a great job keeping everyone in place and alive. She was wondering how she could convince both the doctor and Dream that the doc would be better on their side. “Did you bring supplies?”

“We did,” Niki answered distractedly. She held up the box with the food Bad had assembled; the same box Dream had...procured for them some time ago . He’d taken it straight out of the code, frowning as he did the whole time. Bad said something about him not liking cheating. How using your own powers was cheating, she had no idea. “What would you like first? Food or medicine?”

“Do you have weakness potions? In case certain people need help remaining in bed?”

“I can help with that,” Techno said, holding a mauve potion out. Ponk grinned eerily wide.

“My sanity thanks you,” the doctor said. Niki had no idea who had set the doctor off, but she was glad it hadn't been her.

“So you have all the potions?” Skeppy asked curiously.

“All the weaknesses,” Techno answered. “Niki has the healing ones. Did Halo not give you any?”

“He didn't! It's like he doesn't trust me with them. Gave me some food though.”

“If he doesn't, I have a feeling it's for good reason,” Niki said with a snort.

“Doc! I'm starving. Is food here yet?” asked a voice from the wooden building. A man with red and blue 3D glasses on poked his head out. Niki grinned and hurried over to him.

“Jack!” She briefly stored the box and wrapped her arm around the bandage-wrapped man. “How are you?”

“You heard me. I'm starving,” he said, but he hesitatingly wrapped his arm around her back. “Bring me food, Nik?”

“Of course. As long as no one's going to stab me for being here,” she answered cheerily. Jack twitched, and his body temperature rose.

“You give me food, and anyone who tries to stab you will have the curse of my everlasting grudge upon them. They will never sleep in peace again.”

“As someone who's been the target of your everlasting grudge before, I don't think it is very effective,” Tommy said, floating smugly over Jack.

“You’re f\*\*\*\*\* dead. I think it works fine.”

“That was the—the f\*\*\*\*\* virus, not you. You let the thing take over you to have a f\*\*\*\*\* chance to get at me,” Tommy said, his voice rising.

“And it f\*\*\*\* worked! Do you need another lesson in what happens when you f\*\*\*\* mess with Jack Manifold?”

“Maybe you need to know what happens when you mess with f\*\*\*\*\* Tommyinnit! Who do you think lured you all into a trap?”

“You did a great job acting like f\*\*\*\*\* bait. A real life f\*\*\*\*\* damsel in distress. You should talk to whoever your little stage manager is because they forgot to put you in the f\*\*\*\*\* dress.”

“F\*\*\*\*\* you! You—”

“As fun as this has been to listen to for the last two minutes,” Niki firmly interrupted. Tommy instantly shut his mouth as he had quickly learned was the right thing to do when she got started. “There are several people who need to eat, and if we’re gone too long, I don’t doubt a big scary demon will come out from our base looking for us.”

“Let him come,” Jack boasted. Niki ignored him and pulled out the red box again. “I’ve crawled out of Hell. I’m not afraid of no demon.”

“That’s because you haven’t met ours,” Niki smirked. “His muffins alone would have you pleading for mercy.”

“No, Niki. Don’t. It’s bad enough these f\*\*\*\* imbeciles get your food. They’re not getting anywhere close to Bad’s muffins,” Tommy said. He pulled out a sword and pointed it at Jack.

“No muffins for you.”

“Keep your f\*\*\*\*\* muffins. They’re probably one of the ways the f\*\*\*\* eggperor mind-controls you!”

“Sure,” Niki said flatly. She blinked. “Wait. What did you call him?”

“You heard that s\*\*\*\* too?” Tommy said. He floated nearer her and play whispered in her ear. “I thought they were crazy, but turns out they’re s\*\*\*\*\* at names too.”

“We’re not the f\*\*\*\*\* crazy ones! You f\*\*\*\*\* lot are!” Jack shouted. “And for your f\*\*\*\*\* information, Tubbo was the one that came up with the name. Didn’t want to call the f\*\*\*\*\* devil by name.”

“They’re listening to Tubbo,” Tommy play-whispered again. “Yeah, they’ve f\*\*\*\*\* lost it.”

“Should you be talking s\*\*\*\*\* about Tubbo like that? He’s your f\*\*\*\*\* best friend!”

“Was,” Tommy said blankly. In that way he’d taken to imitating from Techno. The one he used when he was most angry. “What f\*\*\*\*\* idiot would be best friends with the guy who exiled him, sicked an evil E—abomination on him, and then refuses to believe he’s in his right mind while planning to f\*\*\*\* tear his current family apart.”

Niki stared at the see-through ghost. Tommy hadn’t used the term before. He hadn’t even tried to knock any of their heads (maybe because he couldn’t?). Looks like she’d underestimated him. She’d thought—never mind. It wasn’t fair to Tommy. Just her old anger and bitterness blocking her view.

“Family? That’s the Egg’s f\*\*\*\*\* angle? That’s how the f\*\*\*\* thing’s got you all this time?”

“Jack, do you want the food we brought or not?” Niki said. Jack tensed, likely hearing the edge in her voice for the warning it was. He grumbled and walked into the basic building. He moved to the nearest makeshift bed and sat down.

“F\*\*\*\* yes, I want your cooking,” Jack said.

“What? Not scared it has f\*\*\*\*\* ‘mind-control’ juice?” Tommy asked sarcastically.

“If Niki made it, it’s worth the risk. And even if does, what the f\*\*\*\*\* would it matter? We’re f\*\*\*\*\* either way.”

“Good to know you can see reason,” Niki said, pulling out a quiche. “Here. For being such a sensible patient.”

“F\*\*\*\*\* finally,” Jack said, snatching the quiche and devouring it. Niki sighed and left a second next to him on the bed before moving on.

Sam’s dark eyes glinted and briefly flashed as she came closer, but otherwise Sam sat dangerously still. Niki kept her posture as loose and unthreatening as possible. She could see Tommy out of the corner of her eye doing the opposite.

“Good morning, Sam,” Niki said with a faint smile. Nothing too wide. Just enough to show she meant no harm. “Hungry?”

“I’m not eating anything any of you prepare,” Sam said. Curls of smoke wafted up either side of his mask. The chain attached to his hand clanked as he crossed his arms. “I hope you know that.”

“I do,” Niki said slowly. “But I was hoping to change your mind.”

She pulled out a meat pie. She had vaguely remembered Sam special ordering these ages ago. He used to say something about the protein in them keeping him going faster than her sweet treats. Niki hoped she remembered the recipe for his favorite correctly. She held the pie out.

“Here. Made especially for you,” Niki said.

“I’m sure it was,” Sam hissed, and Tommy immediately floated in-between them. Dark green eyes narrowed, and their sclera flashed between black and white as Sam emitted a longer, higher-pitched hiss.

“I’d f\*\*\*\*\* back off if I were you,” Jack called from behind them.

“I have Blast Protection IV and Feather Falling IV. I’ll be fine,” Niki said, resisting the urge to pull out her shield.

“Sam! Stop that!” cried a female voice from the next room over. Niki nearly dropped the meat pie as Puffy darted into the room. “You’re going to hurt yourself and—” The pirate captain stopped, her eyes caught on Niki.

“Niki!” Puffy burst, ignoring the hissing growing louder behind her as she threw herself at Niki. Sam’s uncovered skin was glowing, and Niki barely had the reaction speed to grab Puffy and pull her behind her when Sam blew up.

Heat passed on either side of Niki, and she vaguely thought that she’d be lucky to be let out of the bubble in the next month. Bad and Dream would both put her in her own personal bubble if she wasn’t careful. The dorks.

Heat subsided, and Niki stood barely singed from the attack. (Though part of her wondered if it was an attack or merely a stressful reaction from a creeper hybrid.) Tommy stood in front of her with a shield in his hands.

“You all right?” Tommy asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Niki said. “You?”

“I’m a ghost, remember? Can’t kill what’s already dead,” Tommy said, putting his shield away. “Bet I looked f\*\*\*\* awesome saving your a\*\*\*\* right there!”

“You did,” Niki said, peering around the boy to assess the damage. Sure, she could see through him if she wanted, but she’d found he didn’t really like people looking through him. She couldn’t blame the kid.

The bed Sam had been bound to was in splinters. The chain had snapped. Sam stood in the middle of a several block-deep hole, soot-black and—Niki averted her eyes quickly. The man had blown off his clothes as well.

An arm choked around her neck, and she instantly kicked her attacker in the midsection like Techno had taught her. She aimed for the groin next but saw a bewildered Puffy bent over and recovering from a body blow. A flash of guilt pricked her, but satisfied justice tampered it down. One body blow between her and Puffy was more than fair.

“...Niki?” Puffy asked out-of-breath. Niki half-hated the part of her that understood the layers to the one word question and ignored them out of spite.

“Sorry. You startled me,” Niki said coolly. She didn’t want to deal with Puffy right now. That’s why Techno had agreed to take Puffy food, in particular. Puffy must have heard Sam’s hissing and come to play hero, as always. Niki straightened. She wouldn’t back down. “Did Skeppy and Techno give you food yet?”

“Techno was helping Ponk calm Tubbo,” Puffy said, mirroring Niki and straightening. The fearsome pirate captain tried to look unfazed, but her wince upon standing straight betrayed her. Her sunglasses pointed at Tommy. “He could use some help with that.”

“You should get back there and help,” Tommy said. He was floating next to Niki, staring at Puffy but trying to keep sight of the hole. He was trying so hard to keep Niki safe. He was

getting his favorite gapple tart when they got back. And probably his own batch of pumpkin spice muffins knowing Bad. “We’ve got things covered over here.”

“I’m sure you do. But let me talk to Sam. He’s more likely to listen to me than you.”

“That’s a great idea,” Niki said, passing her hand through Tommy’s in order to keep him from snapping at Puffy. She wished she could hold his hand. How things had changed in the last year that here she stood next to Tommy of all people and against her—against Puffy. But she couldn’t—not after what Puffy had done. What she had *not* done. “We’ll leave you to that.”

Niki turned and skirted past the hole to the half-blown doorway Puffy had come through. Predictably Puffy attempted to grab her arm and call her back, but she dodged the attempt and walked quickly to the other room.

Niki held for a minute, wondering if the other woman would dash after her. She didn’t. Niki wondered why she still hoped Puffy would. Pushing the mix of disappointment and anger down, Niki marched to the other side of the room. The young fox hybrid lay unmoving on another makeshift bed. He looked so young. Because he was.

Brushing her fingers softly across Fundy’s forehead and bandages, Niki recalled the tiny fox hybrid bouncing up to her with a handful of flowers. Wilbur swinging the tiny child around in a circle and declaring Fundy the cutest child to ever exist. She had often wondered what had happened to that Wilbur; once, full of life and love and song and dreams. Speaking of which, where was Ghostbur? Had he been by to check on his living self’s only child?

Focusing on the fox hybrid in front of her instead of the one in her memories, Niki fished out a regen potion. Ponk had given strict orders to give Fundy one regen potion every six hours. The fox hybrid’s skull needed continual mending to fix the spiderweb fractures left by the continual tread of invisible creepers. She shivered. For all the trouble they were worth, Niki was definitely grateful that Techno and Dream were her idiots and not someone else’s.

“Is he getting better?”



Niki shrugged as she stored the empty bottle into her inventory. “I’m the wrong person to ask. That’s a Ponk question. We can ask when we get outside.”

“Tech should be done soon,” Tommy agreed. “And I guess Skeppy’ll come with him. Think he’ll manage to kill Snapmap?”

“Depends on if ‘Sappy’ is awake enough to use his charms on Skeppy and lose the last barrier between him and death,” Niki said. Bad was really trying to keep his adoptive son alive, and she could forgive him that. Especially since he was working equally hard to keep the rest of them alive too. The crossbolt buried in his son’s shoulder was proof of that.

She hadn’t been sure that it had actually come from Bad, but given Techno’s change of opinion on the former “eggperor” (she stifled a chortle at the name), Niki knew she hadn’t been dreaming. Without speaking, she and Tommy slipped past Sapnap and Tubbo’s room to exit the house without returning the way they came.

“Tommy?”

Niki cringed and wondered if all the luck had stayed back home with their sleeping Admin.

Tommy whooshed past her and phased through the backdoor. A more physical teenager tried to run past her after him, but she grabbed the back of his vest to stop him. Her whole body rang with pain as she pulled the kid back. She nearly let him go, but she wanted—she wanted one pre-Egg relationship to have a chance. If Tubbo went after Tommy now, they might end up like the rest of them. With what once was broken beyond repair.

“Woah there,” she wheezed. Her chest was pinching and making breathing painful. Thankfully, the ram hybrid stopped. Letting go of the kid’s vest, she pressed her hand against her chest. It needed to stop throbbing.

“You okay?” asked Tubbo, his eyes peering out of his bangs. “Didn’t Sapnap stab you recently?”

“He did,” Niki said with a small smile. Tubbo was nothing if not blunt. “But I’m fine.”

“Don’t look fine,” Tubbo said. He wrung his hands, and his ear flicked at the sides of his head. He glanced back at the door and then at her. “Want me to get Ponk?”

“No. I know what he’ll say. Tell me to go back to the bubble and let myself heal. But if I don’t come, then Bad’ll come out himself.”

“Yeah. Wouldn’t want that,” Tubbo said, disgust curling around his nose. “Might actually give us a chance to take out the Egg’s influence at its source.”

“The Egg’s gone, Tubbo,” Niki said. “It’s been gone since Dream ripped its code out at the roots.”

“No it’s not. You can’t fool me. If it was, why would Tommy be like that?”

“Why would Tommy be a ghost?” Niki clarified. The kid didn’t nod, but he did freeze. “I have a better question. If the Egg isn’t gone, then why would Tommy be a ghost? Wasn’t it using Tommy’s body as a vessel? Didn’t it try to erase Tommy entirely?”

Tubbo shifted, and his ears pinned to the sides of his head. He still bent his head to give her a better view of his horns.

“Apparently it didn’t want Tommy anymore,” Tubbo said. “Especially since it can’t mind-control ghosts.”

“It can’t what?”

“Yeah. Bet you think we didn’t know that. Ghostbur told us. He’s never been under the control of the Egg,” Tubbo said, giving his head a tiny buck. Heat that had nothing to do with her injury flared in her chest.

“Really? Then where was he the whole time the Egg was taking over the server!?”

“Looking for Friend. I think the Egg got him.”

“Looking for Friend?” Niki repeated. Convenient. So very convenient. Tiny things that had always felt off about Ghostbur started to swirl in her mind. Things that reminded her that her once-best friend was one of the best actors out there. Hadn’t he convinced everyone about how righteous a cause his drug van was? She pushed her growing theory aside to talk to Techno and possibly Bad about later. Maybe even Dream if he was awake. Phil quickly crossed her mind, and she mentally added a “definitely” to if Dream was awake.

Right now, she wanted to help a kid save his friendship with his own best friend.

“Tubbo, do you even know why Tommy’s a ghost?”

“Yeah. He died. Probably because the Egg decided to take over Dream instead.”

Take over Dream....? “You saw how Tommy acted when he was the Egg’s puppet. Did you see Dream act like that?”

“No. But that just means that the Egg got better at acting like a person. That’s what it was trying to do the whole time.”

Huh. Maybe the thing was.

“Tubbo, Tommy’s personal code was infected by the Egg. How was there even enough to make a ghost after it left him?”

The kid paused and again peered up at her.

“Well, he’s here, isn’t he?”

“Yes, but it’s not by chance,” Niki said tiredly, struggling to ignore the growing burn in her chest. She looked around for some place to sit, but either she went back to the Puffy’s shared room or Sam and Jack’s broken one. Or she could be desperate and try the one Sapnap shared with Tubbo.

She grabbed the kid’s hand and dragged him outside. Knowing Tommy, he was around here somewhere invisible (he wouldn’t leave her alone with proven threats). They wouldn’t run into him unless he wanted to be run into.

Once outside, she took a page out of Dream’s book and sat on the grass a ways outside the house. She patted the space beside her, and a snorting Tubbo sat next to her. Sitting there, straight as a board and crossing his arms, he looked so young. So like and unlike the kid who chattered near nonstop about bees and flowers and honey and life. Dream was right: they really weren’t kids anymore. Niki hated that this server had done that. Not the Egg, but them. Tommy and Tubbo had gone through so much even before that cursed virus. At the hands of adults who were supposed to help and protect them.

She wished she could go back like Dream had. Except she wouldn’t run and hide. She would do all she could to stop this madness. No. She would stop the server from falling into ruin. If she had to drag her idiots kicking and screaming into helping her fix it—No. That wasn’t fair. Who would Dream have dragged to help him? Her? Who had been firmly on Wilbur’s side for so long? Techno? Who for all he knew (for all they still knew—a fact that haunted Techno) had left Dream to isolation and torture? Bad? Who had been the Egg’s from its appearance? Ranboo? Who had struggled so hard to be neutral he would have become part of the Eggpire if it wasn’t for Ender? Tommy...? Yeah. That hardly was worth mentioning. As were the two best friends who’d left him to rot in prison.

Sure, Dream could have cared. Could have chosen to save them anyway. But why would he have? Why *should* he have?

Tubbo gave a small bray and shook his head.

“So? You going to explain about how Tommy’s a ghost?”

“Yeah, sorry. Got a bit distracted,” Niki said, focusing on the present. She didn’t have whatever power Dream had that had pulled him back to the past, and so what was done was done. “After the Egg, from what I understand, Tommy was nothing but fragments of code...”

## Chapter End Notes

Ender Translation:

$\exists x \neg \forall y (x \neq y) \wedge \forall z (z \neq x \rightarrow \exists w (w \neq z \wedge \forall v (v \neq w \rightarrow \exists u (u \neq v \wedge \forall t (t \neq u \rightarrow \exists s (s \neq t \wedge \dots)))$  – If you run away again, I will trap you in a bathtub.

☐<sub>ψ</sub> ∧ ωω⌈<sub>ψ</sub> }  $\overline{\Phi}_o \overline{\Phi} \Delta \circ \omega \Delta \perp \Delta \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq$ . – He needs to take a bath.

$\overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq_{\mathcal{W}} U_i \overline{\Phi} \Phi U_{\mathcal{W} \cup \lambda \mathcal{W}} i \mid U \Pi \Omega \rho \vdash \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \Delta \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \psi' \mid \dashv \approx_{\mathcal{W}} \Delta \mathfrak{h}' \mid \Omega \sqsubseteq i U [\cdot]. \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq_{\Omega} \Pi \sigma \sqsubseteq$   
 $\sqsubseteq_{\mathcal{W}} \overline{\Phi} \Delta \rho_{\mathcal{W}} \mid \Delta \mathcal{T} \overline{\Phi}_{\mathcal{W} \times} \sqsubseteq i \mid \neq \Delta \neq \Delta \mid U_i \overline{\Phi} \Phi U_{\mathcal{W}} \overline{\Phi}_{\Omega} \mathfrak{h} \Pi \Omega.$  – The little one is  
lucky that he's Dream's child. Though he takes after his papa a little too much

$\lceil \Psi \rceil^{\text{I}} \vdash \overline{\Phi} \wedge U \nVdash \lceil \Psi \rceil^{\Delta} \cap' \} \Omega \sqsubseteq \text{I}[\cdot]$ . – Definitely Dream's child.

# When You Are Two of a Kind

## Chapter Summary

Tommy tries to live in a world where he avoids Tubbo and gravitates towards Dream, while Ranboo tries to deal with his split personality. They get varying results.

## Chapter Notes

I wanted to thank Ayonne for beta-ing again. Seriously Ayonne's help was invaluable. Without it, trust me, this chapter would have been confusing to say the least.

Also I will answer comments tomorrow because I'm short on time, but I didn't want any of you to wait any longer than the ridiculous months I've been averaging between chapters. Hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Niki was still talking to Tommy's former best friend. He refused to come any closer until she left the two-faced goat boy. As of the moment Tubbo chose to be a spy for the Kinoko b\*\*\*\*\*, Ranboo was his best friend. He was sure the enderman part of his new best friend hated him, but that didn't matter. Lots of people hated him. He'd learnt to deal with it. Tommy was a big man. He could handle it. So what if all people did was tolerate him? It was fine.

Okay, so he was exaggerating about Tubbo's betrayal. It was what Tommy did. Maybe Tubbo didn't hate him, but he still chose the Kinoko b\*\*\*\*\* over Tommy. Chose to believe others over Tommy. Again. Sure, he said he wanted to save Tommy, but like with exile, he didn't *listen* to Tommy. Very few people did. He'd once thought Tubbo was the only one who *really* did. But then he'd once thought Dream was the bane of the earth, and look how that turned out. To be absolutely f\*\*\*\*\* clear, Dream was still a green b\*\*\*\*\*, but he wasn't half-bad. And definitely not a *complete* wrong'un. He was like maybe a quarter wrong'un. A very strong quarter.

Niki was still talking to Tubbo. Scowling, Tommy wrapped his arms around himself and suddenly wished to be back in their personal decision dome as he decided to call it. He wasn't going to call it a f\*\*\*\*\* "bubble." There was nothing bubbly about it. He floated

upside-down and thought about how bubbles popped to keep from comparing Dream's solidity to his wispy own. He failed.

How ironic. He wanted Dream. His worst enemy was now the second closest thing he had to a best friend. And the closest thing he had to a big brother. Plus his former big brother figure was probably his worst enemy. Tommy had seen Wilbur's behavior during the "battle." Had seen him float away towards Kinoko after everyone was taken to the infirmary. He knew Wilbur. So he knew Wilbur was up to something.

Dream needed to wake up soon.

"Tommy!" Niki's voice called up from closer to their decision dome than she had been a minute ago. "Time to go back!"

She was facing the opposite way from where he was, and for a second he wanted to stay invisible. See if she bothered to keep looking for him. The image of a sharp blade impaled in Niki's shoulder smothered the urge. He floated quickly down to her.

Her lips slid into a small smile when she caught sight of him, but he deliberately frowned at her.

"Why'd you have to stop and talk to goat boy?"

"Because he needed me to," Niki answered. Brown eyes steadied into his. "Because *you* needed me to."

Heat rose to Tommy's face. "If I talk to that b\*\*\*\* again, it'll be too soon."

"We'll see," she said as if she knew s\*\*\*\*. Like all so-called adults. "Techno and Skeppy should be headed this way soon. Ready to go back?"

“I’d say I was born ready, but I’m not that lame,” Tommy said, letting his scowl turn into a dazzling grin. He saw welcome pink walking up to them next to glittering blue and waved eagerly. “Took you two long enough.”

“Had to keep this idiot from un-aliving my best friend’s kid,” Skeppy said, sticking his thumb over his shoulder at Techno, who grunted in offense.

“I told you, I was trying to help him eat.”

“By stuffing a whole loaf of bread down his throat? I *know* you have better bedside manner than that.”

“Not sure you want to bet much on that,” Techno said. “All of our erstwhile enemies fed and taken care of?”

“They all got their care packages. Most of them were even smart enough to not believe they were poisoned.”

“Sounds like they still have some brain cells,” said Skeppy. He threw his arms behind his head. “I thought I heard an explosion earlier though.”

“You did. Sam thought it was a good idea to explode on Niki,” Tommy said. He puffed out his chest. “I protected her.”

“He did. Thanks to him I barely had a scratch,” Niki said. Her smile dimmed. “Tubbo met us as we left the danger zone.”

“He did? Must have been where he ran off to after this one tried to kill Sappy,” Skeppy said with a straining smile.



“And Snapmap’s still alive?” Tommy asked. “Niki was talking to Tubbo for hours. I’d think the Blade would have succeeded in killing one idiot in that time.”

“I talked to him for around 10 minutes tops.”

“So f\*\*\*\* forever.”

“Weren’t you and Tubbo best friends?” asked Skeppy. He wasn’t looking at Tommy, but Tommy had a feeling he was listening really closely. The guy seemed a bit too obsessed with the idea of “best friends.” Though considering the guy’s best friend was Badboyhalo, it made a little sense. It would be a sad world indeed when Bad decided to betray anyone without a viral influence. Actually, even with one, the man had only had one argument with the diamond golem. Sure it ended with the golem dead, but...

Never mind. Maybe friendship had no chance in this life.

“We were. And then the b\*\*\*\*\* boy decided to use me as an excuse to spy on us.”

“He thinks you’re brain-washed.”

“I’m not,” Tommy said.

“But he thinks you are. He’s trying to save you,” Skeppy said. Another adult that thought he knew s\*\*\*\*\*.

“Like your precious Sappy,” said Techno flatly.

“Yeah. Like Sappy,” Skeppy agreed. And then he caught onto Techno’s tone. “Sappy means well!”

“Too bad ‘meaning well’ didn’t stop him from throwing you in a prison made for his so-called best friend.”

“The Egg made the prison.”

Tommy flinched and considered floating away.

“And ‘Sappy’ used it,” Techno countered.

“He thinks we are under the Egg’s control.”

“So what you’re saying is that you don’t mind if they lock you up again.”

“What I’m saying is that I don’t think we should blame them for reacting the way they are!”

“I’m going to stop you right there, Skeps,” Niki said, literally stopping and turning to face the dumb diamond golem. “We are all responsible for our actions. *Your* best friend doesn’t hide behind the E—” She peeked up at Tommy and continued, “Viral infection. He owns up to his actions. At some point, we all have done so. Your Sappy and Tubbo have to do the same, or else we’re all going to keep repeating the same mistakes.” Her shoulders slumped. “And if they don’t then...then we need to keep going without them.”

“Sappy’ll come around. You’ll see,” the dumb diamond golem said with his trademark floppy grin. “And Tubs too! And then we’ll go back to what we were in the very beginning.”

“The very beginning?” Niki asked quietly.

“Yeah! Waaaay back when Dream first started this server. It was clear what Bad’s most ambitious kid wanted: a safe place where all his friends could hang out and chill. He wanted to build the family most of us didn’t have.”

Tommy stared at the glittering blue man.

“You’re lying.”

“Lying? Why would I be lying? It’s pretty obvious with what he’s done for you guys. The soft muffin, as Bad calls him, likes making safe places. But given where he got his manhunt skillz, it’s not a real surprise.”

Techno snorted. “Figures the overgrown squealer would think like that.”

Pushing back thoughts of an exile that never occurred and a murder that didn’t happen, Tommy bit his tongue. No point telling anyone how Dream only wanted it to be safe for anyone *he* considered important. How dynamite and swords and slaughter awaited everyone else. How Dream would give a kid over to be violated by a viral code because he didn’t like him. Tears pricked at the thought of how much a younger Tommy had tried so hard to get his hero’s attention.

Words and anger building at the base of his throat, Tommy became invisible and surged ahead. No one would hurt Niki with two of the server’s best PvPers with her. And right now Tommy wanted to yell at (see) one person. To shake him and—and *demand* he explain what Tommy should have done to be deemed important by Dream. To be one of those Dream hurried to protect. To ask how Tommy had become one of those Dream was eager to destroy.

Dream *did* want to protect him now, right? He was—he was one of Dream’s precious people now. For sure. He belonged in Dream’s personal decision dome. Dream didn’t think Tommy was a nuisance anymore. He’d more than proven himself a big man worthy of having around, hadn’t he?...why’d he even care what the green b\*\*\*\*\* thought about him?

He floated invisibly over said green b\*\*\*\*\*’s bed. The demon who had lead the E—the thing to his location, who had directed it into Tommy’s code, sat next to the still-unconscious green b\*\*\*\*\*. Tommy breathed, hating how—how he felt safe here. Safe and at home. Like apparently the green b\*\*\*\*\* wanted people to feel on his dumb, dangerous server. But whose fault was it that the server wasn’t safe?

*The three rules had been there for a reason.*

Tommy gripped both his elbows and felt his teeth grit together. The green b\*\*\*\*\* needed to get up and answer his questions. He floated down and hovered over sleeping ugly's face. The guy looked a lot younger when he wasn't awake and all...down or whatever. Bad peeked over his book at the guy and unknowingly Tommy before sighing. He reached over and ruffled the green b\*\*\*\*\*'s blond hair.

"You need to wake up soon, or I'm going to have to talk to Ponk about how to input an IV. And I know how much you don't like needles," Bad said. The green b\*\*\*\*\* didn't magically wake up for the demon, and the black, clawed hand settled itself on the blond head while Tommy was forced to watch. Another weary sigh deflated the demon. "You've always been stubborn. You'll only wake up when you want to."

If Tommy didn't know better, he'd think the wuss of a demon was trying to make himself feel better. The black hand went back to the book. White eyes stared at the pages, but even after Tommy counted to one hundred, the demon didn't flip a single page. Tommy wondered if this was what it looked like when a parent worried over their child. He frowned. Would anyone bother to do the same if Tommy was on the bed instead?

An image of the man on the bed slumped over his broken code and near falling asleep flitted through Tommy's mind.

Pushing the thought away and falling forward, Tommy allowed himself to flop on the slumbering idiot. Dream didn't even twitch, and Tommy decided to make himself comfortable on the green b\*\*\*\*\*'s bumpy body. It wasn't anything that Tommy hadn't already done when he was broken code. And no one would see. He was still invisible.

But then when he was adjusting, his code clicked and then clinked against another. The other code, vibrant and green and powerful, clinked back, and Tommy stood in a field of grass. Sheep *baa* -ed nearby, and one cow mooed from several blocks away. Staring beyond the field, a mountain towered and a river on the left flowed into the sea on the right. Looking behind, a forest of birch trees reached towards the sky and brushed the blue with green.

How in the f\*\*\*\* had he gotten off the server and onto a new one?

“Tommy?”

Tommy’s head snapped towards the small flock of sheep, and a man in a ridiculous green hoodie stepped out from the bundle of wool. He would call the man familiar, but he wasn’t. Tommy had seen Dream without his mask. Several times at this point. The first time had been a bit of a shock with just how anticlimactic it had been; what with the “most heartless” b\*\*\*\* on the server clinging to the “most annoying” b\*\*\*\* on the server in a pathetic sobbing heap. And then the poor excuse for a demon had unmasked Dream like it wasn’t some social taboo to do so. And Dream had cried. The worst wrong’un of all the server had cried. Like he was a person instead of the greatest evil to ever happen to the server.

He hated how much that scene had stuck in his brain.

And now this man in a green hoodie stood staring at him with an open face and glittering green eyes with only a passing resemblance to Dream. Dream’s eyes never glittered, and even without the mask Dream had never looked so happy. And there was no mask at all. Not even to the side of his head.

“Are you okay?”

“Am I okay?” Tommy repeated. “What do you f\*\*\*\* think? I’m in some place I’ve never seen with some guy I’ve never met in my life!”

“Tommy? Is this some kind of sick joke? I thought you were done with those,” the green b— guy said with a roll of his eyes. He stuck his hands into his hoodie pocket. “If that’s how you’re going to be, I’m going to go back to shearing the sheep. I need a couple of more beds to perfect the MLG with Ranboo. I thought you might be interested in helping, but since you’re not...”

A growl vibrated through Tommy.

“Stop. Stop pretending to be him.”

“Pretending to be who?” said the green guy with another eye roll. “Myself?”

“That’s it. No more f\*\*\*\* around. I’m going to prove you’re not him.” With a squaring of his shoulders, Tommy flew right into the guy’s chest. The guy got knocked backwards and let out an “oof.” Tommy lay on top of the guy, crushing his chest with his suddenly more solid weight.

“Okay,” the completely solid guy wheezed. “That’s it. I’m going to tell Bad no more muffins for you.”

“What the f\*\*\*\*?” Tommy gaped. He pushed himself up. Gravity had decided he was now under its sway and nearly had him smack back down. But he showed gravity he was still the biggest man around and stumbled upwards into a standing position.

“Whatever joke this is, I hope it was worth losing a couple of batches of Bad’s muffins,” the green guy that couldn’t be Dream said. He stood with obviously fake effort. “He owes me a couple of favors, and I’ll use them all to help you lose a few pounds so you stop hitting like a truck. Or maybe I’ll sick Ender on you instead.”

His hands had weight as he lifted them in midair to stare at them. He squeezed them into fists, and they pinched as he tightened. Not airy. Solid. Like Dream’s arm when Tommy grabbed it.

“Kid, you okay?” Those clear green eyes tried to meet his, but Tommy couldn’t focus on them. The ground beneath him refused to let him sink through it no matter how little he held onto his presence. “All right. Got it. You’re definitely not okay. Time to call in the big guns.”

The green guy stepped away, and Tommy lunged forward without thought. He grabbed the man’s green sleeve. The guy stopped, just like Dream would have.

“Tommy?” the guy echoed again.

“Dream?” Tommy croaked. The guy’s grin was ridiculously bright.

“Feeling better?” Dream smirked, and Tommy’s memories spun to a man welcoming Tommy onto his server. Was this that Dream? Had Tommy gone back in time? “Let’s get you to Bad just in case.”

Tommy let the green guy—Dream drag him away from the sheep. Once they passed over a hill, Tommy caught sight of a large, impossibly-built wooden and quartz mansion. The ridiculousness of the design had Tommy pulling backwards from Dream to marvel at it. Dream looked over his shoulder at Tommy with growing confusion and worry.

“Toms?”

The nickname snapped him out of his stupefied wonder. He stared at the clear-eyed man. Dream gave him a soft look and smile.

“You aren’t thinking of how a cobblestone tower would add to the aesthetic again? Because Techno’s made his opinion on that clear.”

“Techno?” Tommy asked. Had he come to an altered past? Techno came during Pogtopia, and by that time, no one saw Dream without his mask. Not even SnapMap and Gogy.

“Yeah. Techno. Because if any of the rest of us asked, you wouldn’t have bothered to listen.”

“Techno can’t f\*\*\*\* tell me what to do!”

“He says different,” Dream said smirking again. Tommy oddly felt like smiling at the expression but grumbled instead. The two soon approached the door of the weird mansion. Dream threw the door open. “Hey guys! Look who I found outside playing with the sheep!”

“The sheep? Are you sure it wasn’t the cows?” said Niki as she came through a door that Tommy recognized as going into the kitchen. Like it did back ho— “Trying to get out of helping Bad with his supply run? Bad luck, kid. He hasn’t gone yet. Was too worried about where you’d gotten to.” She dusted her flour-covered hands on her apron. “I’m a little tempted to give your sandwich to Ranboo and Ender and have them enjoy it. You can have one of Dream’s pathetic loaves for lunch instead.”

“They’re not that bad,” Dream muttered. “And besides I was going to use my favor to tell Bad not to give him muffins..”

Niki stared at Dream with utter horror.

“You would do that to him?”

“He tackled me to the ground! After pretending he didn’t know me!”

“Still no muffins is a terrible, unnecessarily harsh punishment for what amounts to pushing you and making a bad joke.”

“So no sandwich?”

“No sandwich,” Niki confirmed. Tommy *knew* Niki was the second best woman ever. He’d heard too many tales of Phil’s wife to say first, but right now she was d\*\*\*\* close. “Where did you go, Toms?”

The nickname had him tensing and loosening in equal measure. He hadn’t heard it since early L’Manberg. And now he’d heard it twice.

“There you are, you muffinhead!” came another voice behind him. Fingers pinched themselves lightly around his ear. “We already said you weren’t getting out of helping. We



need to find diamonds to make new enchantment tables after you destroyed the last ones.”

A protest pointed at Ender having an equal hand in destroying the tables rattled in Tommy’s head. Where had that thought come from? What was going on? Why was Bad able to grab him—

“What the f\*\*\*\*\* is happening?!” Tommy yelled. He squirmed out of the light pinch on his ear and somehow missed the solid pinch which was dumb and frustrated him more. “What the f\*\*\*\*\* are you talking about?!”

“Language!” the owner of the pinching fingers cried. Normally that would have erased Tommy’s doubt over the man being some kind of imposter, but everything here felt wrong. Wrong in a way that reminded him of how the E— *thing* used to try to mess with him.

“Is that the trick you’re going with now?” the woman that acted like Niki scoffed, crossing her arms. “Really, Toms? You need to get more creative. No one’s going to let you skip out on chores because you suddenly got amnesia. Or do you want me to let Dream go through with his plan and have you lose a few muffins?”

“Who said anything about losing muffins?” the strange man who was trying to be Bad asked.

“I did,” said the Dream-look-alike. “You do owe me a couple of favors.”

“And you’re going to waste them on keeping Tommy from a couple of muffins?” The Bad impersonator had the demon’s disappointed scowl down. The scowl lifted to a budding smirk. “Wouldn’t you rather use those favors to get more muffins to yourself? Or get me to look the other way when you make a mess of Niki’s kitchen again?”

“Again?” the Niki imposter said with narrowed eyes.

“I have no idea what Bad’s talking about,” the green guy that was not Dream said quickly. “Weren’t you going to make muffins later today, Bad?”

“As a *favor* to you, of course. I owe you after all,” not-Bad smiled brightly. “Cinnamon swirl?”

“That sounds great. Doesn’t it, Niki?” the green imposter said with a nervous smile. Not-Niki huffed and rolled her eyes.

“I’ll take cinnamon-swirl muffins as a replacement for answers. For now,” the woman imposter said ominously. She grabbed the green imposter’s arm tight and dragged him towards the kitchen. “Though I do believe this idiot has a sandwich to make for our resident child.”

The reflexive protest dissipated out Tommy’s mouth when he realized that the Dream-like figure was being dragged away from him.

“Hey! Wait!” Tommy called. He grabbed the imposter’s free arm. “He has to tell me what’s going on!”

“What’s going on is that you will have to let go and help Bad get supplies before our very patient demon loses said patience,” the Niki imposter quipped. The Dream look-a-like nodded tiredly.

“No! Someone has to tell me what the f\*\*\*\* is going on, and someone is going to do it now! None of you are real! You can’t be! Niki’s still healing from that stab StupidMap gave her and Dream doesn’t go anywhere without his s\*\*\*\*\* mask! Plus I’m supposed to be a ghost who only *Dream*, my worst enemy, can touch because the universe hates me. And where’s the d\*\*\*\*\* decision dome you keep locking us up in?”

All three stood stock-still staring at him. Finally the Dream look-a-like broke the growingly awkward silence.

“What?”

“You heard me. I’m not going to f\*\*\*\* repeat myself,” Tommy growled. “I’ve already asked what the f\*\*\*\*\* is going on. If I didn’t know better, I’d think this is an alternate dimension or some s\*\*\*\*\* like that, but how would I even get there? The last thing I remember was—” He had been trying to sleep on Dream. And then something weird had happened between his code and Dream’s. Dream was an Admin, which meant they had the ability to—to—to do whatever the f\*\*\*\*\* was happening. Build a new world? Within his own code? With copies of his—whatever they were? “Agh! F\*\*\*\*\*! Whatever this is, you need to stop it!”

“Whatever what is?” the Dream look-alike said, acting all confused. Tommy might have believed him if he couldn’t feel the edges of his own code jaggedly bumping against everything all of a sudden.

“This!” Tommy screamed. “Don’t try, green b\*\*\*\*\*! You’re here playing and pretending everything’s okay when everything’s a f\*\*\*\* mess! You got rid of the Egg! Whoop de f\*\*\*\* doo! Everyone on the server thinks we’re all brainwashed and won’t stop bothering us. And now Niki and Bad want to keep them right outside the decision dome until they f\*\*\*\* feel better! And all you keep doing is sleeping and not waking up! How the f\*\*\*\* is that helping?!”

Seething tremors shook Tommy’s shoulders, and everything kept painfully pinching around him.

“What do you want me to do?”

The toneless question drew Tommy’s thoughts away from the growingly sharp squeezes. The creepy, s\*\*\*\*\* mask lined up on the side of a face scarred with shadows of sadness and suspicion. Dream’s real face.

“Wake up? What difference would that make?”

“What the f\*\*\*\*\* is wrong with you?” Tommy hissed. “Are you f\*\*\*\* braindead? Who do you think wants you to never wake up? Ranboob would literally cry himself to sleep every night, and Niki would act like nothing’s wrong right until someone p\*\*\*\*\* her off. I don’t think the soft-hearted demon would survive, especially given that he’s keeping watch over

your bed like you'll disappear. He'd probably find some way to blame himself. The little baby piglin that, by the way, is too absolutely adorable to be yours would likely cry all his moisture out, and considering how vital that is for kids, he might even die because of it. And Techno'd find a way to revive you so he can f\*\*\*\* kill you himself."

"You," the green b\*\*\*\* said. It wasn't a question, and it took Tommy a second to figure out what the stupid b\*\*\*\*\* was saying. In that second he realized that the world around him had somehow frozen. Not-Bad stood behind him, his arm stretched out and face contorted into the beginnings of his "Language" expression. Tommy took an extra second to enjoy the pose before noticing Not-Niki was stuck in a worried look. And nothing else besides him and Dream were moving. This really wasn't real.

And then Tommy's attention snapped back to the implied question. It had been a question in suggestion because if the green b\*\*\*\* said what he wanted plainly like a normal person he'd likely die.

"As much as I'd like to say that I don't care if you wake up or not, that would be a m\*\*\*\*\* lie." Tommy focused at the side of white mask framing one edge of the man's face. "Don't act like you don't know that. And if you're trying to get me to go on and on about how you somehow convinced me to *care* about you and see you as...I dunno, a more sane version of an older brother, you've got another thing coming. You'll just have to deal with the fact that I don't hate you more than I like Niki and Bad's baking. I don't want to risk the quality of their work by having you f\*\*\*\*\* die."

"You don't hate me?"

Everything in Tommy bristled, and he almost snapped. Almost told the green b\*\*\*\*\* that he did hate him. That he only hates him *less* now. But he stupidly met the b\*\*\*\*\*'s eyes, and the shadowy green carried its stupidly familiar dull heaviness. And so Tommy bit his still-too-solid tongue and grumbled out a different answer.

"Sadly no. Hard to hate the guy you watched near kill himself to put you back together. Besides at least you've figured out that I'm a big man. Even asked me for my input with the whole trapping the Kinoko b\*\*\*\*\*/rescuing Skeppy plan. Been a while since anyone's bothered to ask my opinion on anything."

“We used to hate each other,” Dream said, and Tommy scowled.

“You took my discs,” Tommy defended.

“You broke my rules.”

“You exiled me.”

“Technically Tubbo did. And you made a country on *my* land.”

“Wilbur started it.” Tommy felt himself floating back off the ground. “But yeah. *You* tormented me in exile.”

“You threw me in prison.”

“You nearly killed Tubbo.”

“I wasn’t actually planning on killing him. It was part of a plan to get you to throw me in Pandora.”

“You actually wanted to go in there? Are you sick in the head? Also you killed me and took my last life with a potato.”

“You killed my cat.”

“It was *my* cat!”

“How does that make it better?!”

“You threw me to the EGG!!” Tommy shouted in Dream’s face. His whole body heaved with insubstantial shakes. The green b\*\*\*\*\* actually flinched. He brought his hand up and flipped his mask onto his face.

“I did,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* dared to say. As if it was just normal to commit soul-bending atrocities. As if he was the monster Tommy had thought he was. “...sorry.”

...what?

“What?” Tommy asked in a squeaky gasp.

“I...I never meant for it to go—I shouldn’t have done that. Any of it. No wait—most of it.”

“Most of it?” Tommy snapped. His unnecessary breaths raged up and down his throat. “F\*\*\*\*\* you.” He crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. “And what part isn’t in ‘most of it’?”

“Killing you in Pandora,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* said, and Tommy could tell by the slight wobble to the words that this was some form of bad joke. “You killed a cat. Even Techno would have killed you for that.”

“...fine. I could see that. I nearly killed SpamPal for killing Henry. Should have gone through with it.”

“Didn’t he nearly kill you for burning his tower? After which you came running to me for help?”

“Eh. Unnecessary details,” Tommy said with a light shrug. “You going to kill me again?”

“Wasn’t planning on it,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* said with a shrug of his own. “You?”

“Pretty sure we’ve been over the whole ‘I don’t want you dead’ thing. Why? Want me to say it *again*?”

“No. I’m good,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* said. His mask tilted into the light and should have looked ominous as f\*\*\*\*\*, but somehow Tommy felt like it was indicating a real smile. “So I should wake up.”

“Finally. The green b\*\*\*\*\* gets it.”

“Thanks, Toms,” Dream said, and Tommy knew the green b\*\*\*\*\* was smiling behind that irritating mask. “I’ll try to get Bad to make some chocolate chip muffins when I get back.”

“You’d better,” Tommy huffed. A thought stuck and opened his mouth without letting him fully process it. “Did you really kill Punz?”

“...I did,” Dream said, the words too quiet for the annoying man.

“And he was on his last life?”

“He was.”

“And you feel bad about it?”

“...Tommy. Where are you going with this?”

“Then revive him,” said Tommy. “It’s not like death is permanent as long as you’re around.”

The very air around Tommy crackled and crashed into his code, and every part of him jarringly remembered being jagged pieces. And then the pressure lightened only to coil around him again in a threatening squeeze. Dark green eyes found his. Instantly the pressure disappeared.

“I can’t,” Dream whispered. The imagined version of him took a step back. Maybe to distance himself from the question or from his reaction to it. “I can’t.”

“What do you mean ‘*can’t*’? Is the revive book gone?” Tommy pressed even though he shouldn’t. He knew he shouldn’t. But he wouldn’t be him if he didn’t. “If you killed me, would it be permanent?”

“I—I *can’t*,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* repeatedly uselessly. He visibly swallowed and shook his head. “You’ll—you’ll be fine. You’re a ghost.”

“What about the others?” Tommy kept pressing. He should stop. He knew he should. Dream looked like he did when threatened with Spirit’s leather. Had anything really changed? “What if Niki or Techno or Bad died? For good? Would you—Would they be *gone*?”

“I can’t,” Dream said in a near wail. Tommy had never heard the man like this. They both floated in an empty darkness, Dream standing as if on solid ground while Tommy held himself in a hovering position. “I won’t let anyone else die.”

“I don’t think they need your permission.”

“Please, Tommy,” the green b\*\*\*\*\* said in a real, honest-to-goodness whine. “I can’t.”

“Fine. No one dies without your permission because you can no longer use your magic book. Got it,” Tommy said. “And no one can stop being a ghost either.”



“What?”

“That’s fine. I’ll be a f\*\*\*\*\* ghost for the rest of your life. And probably everyone else’s too. I didn’t want a physical body anyway.”

The darkness around them had started to swallow them up.

“You’re waking up. I’m getting chocolate chip muffins.”

“I could use the revive book on you.”

“You could have. Yeah.”

“I—I’m sorry, Toms. I can’t. I *can’t* . If I did—”

“I know. I said I got it,” Tommy said. He couldn’t cross his no-longer-there arms, so he looked into the darkness and away from the pathetic green b\*\*\*\*\*. “You *can’t* . You better pray that no one else dies, because if they do, I’m going to find someone else to try to use the book.”

“Do you even know where it is?” the green b\*\*\*\*\* asked, his dumb voice still trembling..

“I’m the greatest man ever. I’ll figure it out,” Tommy boasted. The green b\*\*\*\*\* chuckled.

“I bet you would.”

The darkness swallowed most of Tommy's senses, but they remained long enough for Tommy to hear one more quiet whispering thought.

"I really wish I could, Toms. For you and Punz both."

---

Ranboo let the small piglin hang off his leg. Dream was awake. He was behind the door. That's what the message had said. But still he was hesitating. He half-expected Ender to grumble in the back of their mind and take over their body long enough to open the door. But his other self was remarkably quiet. Like he had been since they had received the message Dream was awake. Like he had been before when Peace had been given to their care. At least until Peace had forced him out. Ranboo hated the quiet.

"Boo," a tiny, squeaky voice piped up from the side of his leg. "Papa....okay?"

"He should be," Ranboo said, trying to smile. The small one didn't look reassured. And the door remained closed. "Bad's message said so."

"Comm words?" Peace asked squeakily.

"Yes, the message through the comm," Ranboo said. Maybe he should convince Dream to give Peace a comm of his own. Sure he was young and a server mob, but maybe an exception could be made? Admins could do that, right? Give comms to non-player coded beings? Specific ones. Creatures who had transcended normal mob characteristics.

A scoff sounded from the back of his head, and a startled jump shivered through his body. Peace squinted up at him.

"Ender bother Boo 'gain?" the small piglin said with a childish scowl. He looked a lot Techno right then, and somehow that was terrifying.

“He’s not bothering me. He’s....being quiet.”

“Ender *is* botherin’ Boo. Ender should no be quiet. Boo miss Ender,” the little piglin squealed harshly. Boo stared at the small piglin. It felt like Ender was from the back of their brain too.

“You’re not wrong, Pea. I think we all miss Ender a little bit at this point. Considering how everyone around here is, it might be best to keep on telling him,” said Niki as she seemed to appear out of midair behind them. “Now are you going to stand out here all day or are you going in?” She pushed past them and opened the door.

Dream sat up in the bed with a tray of soup in front of him. Ranboo’s sharp senses caught the scent of beetroot.

“I’m fine, Bad. I can feed myself.”

“I know that,” said the demon from where he was standing and hovering at the head of the bed. He was on the side opposite the door, so his worried expression was on full display. “But you were unconscious for a couple of days, so excuse me for making sure you actually get nutrients into you.”

“I get it,” Dream said with a small smile. He looked tired but amused, and something inside Ranboo grew lighter. Ender even took control of their sight long enough to see for himself despite how Ranboo’s thoughts let him know everything they were seeing unless Ranboo blocked him. And Ranboo hadn’t done that since they learned to rely on each other back when the Egg was after them. Even when Ender had a few times to have “private” conversations with Dream.

“Hey! Look who’s here,” Niki said holding up a small pink form. Ranboo realized that there was no weight attached to his leg.

“Peace?” Dream said, his expression growing the tiniest bit more open and bright. He pushed the tray away to make space on his lap and held out his arms. From his position in Niki’s arms, Peace crossed his small arms.

“Papa needs to eat. Bad said so,” the small piglin said. He signaled to Niki to put him down. The smirking woman did. Peace strode over to the bed and stood next to his bemused Papa. “No hugs ‘til Papa eats.”

“Not even a little one?” Dream said with an expression that might have been a pout if people like Dream pouted.

“Papa eat,” said Peace firmly. “Papa need to be okay first.”

“He’s got you there,” Bad said. He then walked over to the other side of the bed and bent down. “Can I hug you until your Papa finishes his food?”

Peace gazed up at Bad and solemnly nodded. The demon obviously smothered a squeal into a small giggle and scooped the small piglin up. He then shot a smug smile over the small pink head at the man sitting gob smacked on the bed.

“Better hurry and eat. Or I’ll ask for some snuggles of my own,” said Niki. Dream rotated his dismayed expression between a smirking Niki and a smiling Bad. He frowned and pulled the tray closer to him. He took the spoon and scooped the spoon in a wide, showy arc before putting it in his mouth. He then spluttered and clattered the spoon back on the tray.

“Dream?” Bad asked, nearly placing Peace onto the bed to better examine the man on the bed. Niki took a couple of steps over and grabbed the demon’s shoulder pulling him away.

“He’s fine,” Niki said in complete unconcern. “He just didn’t check the temperature of the soup before shoving it in his mouth.”

Bad straightened, and small white eyes poked out of the demon’s hood to look at the chagrined man. Dream had on that almost pouting look again. Shadows blackened Bad’s whole face.

“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?!” Bad growled. “You muffinhead!”

“No,” Dream said calmly but quickly. Too quickly. Ender scoffed from the back of their head, and Ranboo wordlessly offered to let him forward.

“ $\nabla \square \sqcap \{ \square \square \sqcap \sqcup \sqcap \wedge ' \overline{\Phi} \sqcup \text{I} \sqcup . \text{I} \overline{\Phi} ' \{ \wedge \square \overline{\Phi} \triangle \text{O} \square \square \sqcap \sqcup \oplus \triangle \nabla \neq \sqcup \sqcup \overline{\Phi} \square \overline{\Phi} \square \sqcup \sqcup \text{I} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \sqcup \sqcup \square \wedge \sqcup . \}$ ”

The entire room snapped towards them.

“ $\sqcup \wedge \sqcap \sqcup \neq ?$ ” Dream said softly. Ranboo found himself thrust forward and staring at the unhidden hope folded onto the man’s face.

“No you don’t,” Ranboo hissed in a whisper. He surged to the back of his head and pulled his other forward. He was not going to let his other self hide. He settled into the back of their mind and jammed himself in place. Ender’s anger surrounded him, but still he held onto his corner. His other needed to talk to Dream, and Dream needed to talk to Ender. Not Ranboo. Later he’d talk to Ranboo. Probably. Maybe.

“ $\triangle \{ \sqcap \square \square \sqcup \sqcup \sqcup \sqcup \text{I} \wedge \neq \{ \square \sqcap \text{I} \wedge \text{O} \overline{\Phi} \square \sqcup \sqcup \text{I} \triangle \nabla \square \wedge \sqcup \text{I} \square \square \sqcup \}$ ,” said Ender. His anger sharpened. “ $\frac{\pi}{2} \sqcup \{ \overline{\Phi} \text{I} \text{I} \sqcup \sqcup \triangle \otimes \sqcup \wedge \square \triangle .$ ”

“No!” burst a little squeaky voice. Peace flailed in Bad’s arms, and Ranboo saw Ender shift their gaze to the small piglin. “Ender no go!”

“What’s this about leaving?” said Niki hard.

“Ender and Ranboo are leaving?” Bad asked, alarmed. Ranboo found himself impressed by how automatically, even stunned, Bad kept a squirming, squealing Peace in his hold.

“That’s what Ender said,” Niki said. “And I want an explanation.”

“He said his purpose is fulfilled, so he has to go back to the guardian of the server.”

“The guardian of the server?” Niki asked.

“The Ender Dragon,” said Bad distractedly. He struggled briefly with Peace but finally got a good hold on the small, distraught piglin so he could gawk at Ender and Ranboo. “She sent you here?”

“The server knew I needed help, so it sent Ender,” said Dream quietly. He glanced at Bad, then Niki, and finally Peace. A hidden smirk flickered across his face, but Ender and thereby Ranboo caught it. “But now that I have stable player support again, he feels his presence is unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary?” Bad gasped. “How? None of us can get Peace to settle down and take a bath like you can! Not even Dream.”

“And no offense to Ranboo,” Nikki added, “but if it weren’t for you, I’m pretty sure Dream and him would have found a way to kill themselves with their MLGs.”

“I know Dream has,” Bad said. “Thankfully we were on more forgiving servers back then. But he has been a bit obsessed with MLGs since he lost a manhunt to me ages ago.”

“I lost a manhunt to George the same way, before I lost the one against you. And if I didn’t up my MLG game, I would have lost a lot more,” Dream interrupted. “And none of that has anything to do with Ender leaving.”

“But the manhunts could be a reason to get him to stay,” Niki said conspiratorially. “Bad knows where we *might* be able to get records of them once this mess with the others is sorted out and we can server hop again.”

That info nearly had Ranboo surging forward and demanding to know the where, when, and how. He'd been dying to finally see those mythical things since Tommy had described them. Plus seeing the boat clutch in real recorded glory would be amazing. But he shoved himself back into the corner of their mind. Thankfully Ender had been too stunned by the others to have noticed Ranboo's slip. That and Tommy appearing out of thin air distracted him.

"No f\*\*\*\*\* way! You know where to get the manhunts?!" Tommy yelled in Bad's face. The demon scowled and called his usual scolding shout when Techno barged in through the door. He had his Orphan Obliterator in his hand.

The piglin hybrid's scary blood red eyes scanned the room, and Ranboo temporarily felt relieved to be in the back of their head until Ender tried to shove him out again using the distraction. Unfortunately his other had forgotten how terrifying Ranboo still occasionally found Techno, so Ender failed. Ender's frustration bit at Ranboo, but Ranboo stayed put. After scanning the whole room, Techno turned to Bad and Niki.

"I heard squealing," Techno explained. "Thought maybe we were under attack."

"Ender wanna leave," Peace whined in a squeal. "I no want Ender to leave."

Techno snorted and turned to the two of them. "You want to leave? Go ahead."

"Techno!" Niki said aghast.

"What? He knows what we do when people leave," said Techno. He casually gestured to Dream. "Hunt them down and drag them right back. If he thinks running away is worth the trouble, let him try."

"I could enchant a compass to lead us right to him just in case," said Dream. His vivid green eyes stared straight at them. "And yes, I can set it to your code, Ender. And another to your and Ranboo's shared code."

“Even if we have to go to the End,” Dream said as a promise. Ender warbled a growl.

“It is,” Dream agreed, those eyes brighter than Ranboo had seen them outside of using the Admin screens. “But every other rule has been broken, so if we have to break the last one....Let’s just say that I think everyone in this room agrees that it would be worth it to find you and bring you back.”

“Do I look like I’d have a problem breaking f\*\*\*\*\* rules?”

“ $\nabla \square \sqcup \nabla \nabla \square \nabla \nabla \nabla$ ,” Dream hissed. He looked around the room for emphasis. “ $\triangle \sqcup \sqcup \circ \mathcal{S} \square \nabla$ .”

Their body stood frozen under the gazes of all the people who had become precious to them. To both of them. And Ranboo felt his other soften under their family's combined affections. Ranboo chuckled in the back of their mind, and irritation poked out of fondness.

[illegible]



Dream's face grew rigid, and he stared at his soup bowl. He took a deep obvious breath and lifted hard eyes.

“ $\triangle \triangle \triangle \asymp \wedge \mathbb{I} \wedge \phi$ ?” Ender hissed harshly.

“Won’ fo’geh wad?”

“Di’ I miz som’tin?”

A thought directly pointed at him raked his side.

“*He’s just standing there eating a muffin. He’s making a mess, but I’m sure Bad will make him clean it up.*”

“*I’m just standing there eating a muffin. He’s making a mess, but I’m sure Bad will make him clean it up.*”

“*I’m just standing there eating a muffin. He’s making a mess, but I’m sure Bad will make him clean it up.*”

“*He did what?*” Ranboo screeched. He hurled away from his corner to see Tommy chasing Skeppy behind Bad. The ghost simply flew through Bad and grabbed the muffin from the diamond golem’s hand. The diamond golem scowled and obviously reached into his inventory only to open an empty hand. He looked in bewilderment at Bad who looked away from the diamond golem. Peace looked up at his current minder and imitated the frustrated, half-turned scowl the demon was wearing, turning away from the golem and everything. Ender moved his vision over to Niki holding a nice hefty stack of Bad’s muffins. Tommy floated over her and smashed the remnants of snatched muffins into his face. Ender’s disgust rolled over their shared mind. “*Nevermind. Justice has been served. Skeppy’s going to have a hard time getting more muffins now.*”

“*I’m just standing there eating a muffin. He’s making a mess, but I’m sure Bad will make him clean it up.*”

“*Now I kinda want to see him try,*” Ranboo admitted. Ender’s amused warble vibrated around him. Ranboo settled near the front and prepared to add commentary to the growingly chaotic scene as Skeppy tried to plead his case to an unamused Niki and a stoic Bad.

“*He’s just standing there eating a muffin. He’s making a mess, but I’m sure Bad will make him clean it up.*”

Ranboo pulsed a sentiment of assurance mixed with irritation at his other.

*“If I wanted you gone, why would I have—”* Ranboo cut the question off and loudly scoffed. *“And I thought Tommy was supposed to be the dumb one.”*

*“I don't know if I should tell you this, but I think you should know that I'm not a fan of you,”* snapped a hiss. *“I don't know if I should tell you this, but I think you should know that I'm not a fan of you.”*

*“Yeah, maybe,”* Ranboo said, letting his other deflect. Their shared vision fell on Dream. He was taking bites of the soup as he watched the impromptu debate continue. *“But I think he's doing better.”*

There was silence for a moment, long enough for dread to build in Ranboo's soul. But then Ender's thought rang fond and sure.

*“I know.”*

## Chapter End Notes

Oops. Forgot the Ender translation:

He shouldn't lie. It's not a good example to the little one.

Wanderer – Ender

We succeeded in rescuing the diamond fool.

Best if I leave now.

The End is off-limits.

ዘግብ'ኣህ ዓቢኣ፤, – You're ours,

ቅህህ ዓፄ ዓቢኣ፤. – All of ours.

ሷህ ፎቅላ ይወቅቅሃ፡ ቅፎቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ህጻኑህ ቅፍቅላ፤ ዓላህ ዓፄ ቅፍቅላ፤  
የቅፍቅላ'ን ስቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ኣፍቅላ፤ ለዓፄ. ቅላቅ የፄ ዓቢኣ፤ ቅላቅ'ን ፍፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤  
ቅፍቅላ፤ ህጻኑህ ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅላቅ ስቅላ፤ ዓፄ ቅፍቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ይፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤  
ስቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤, የቅላቅ'ን የቅላቅ'ን ፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ስቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤  
ቅላቅ'ን ፍፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤ ዓፄ ቅላቅ'ን ለህህህ ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ህጻኑህ የቅላቅ'ን  
ቅፍቅላ፤ የቅፍቅላ፤. – We have better things to do than recreate one of that idiot's manhunts  
right now. And if our demon's going to give the cretin and my other ideas by showing  
them Dream's manhunts, I definitely have to stay and make sure they don't kill  
themselves or anyone else trying to replicate the idiocy.

ነፍሱ ለቅላ፤ ቅላቅ ለህህህ ፍፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤ ዓቢኣ፤? – So what are  
we going to do with the fools outside?

ዘግብ ፍፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ዓቢኣ፤ ቅላቅ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤  
ዓፄ ቅላቅ የፍፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ ዓቢኣ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ቅፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤  
ነፍሱ ስቅላ፤. – You going to come out and deal with this diamond cretin, or am i  
going to have to lash out in order to teach him some manners.

የነፍሱ ዘግብ ለህህህ ይፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
ቅፍቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤. ህህ ነፍሱ ለቅላ፤ ስቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
የቅላቅ'ን የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤. – I see you were back there being  
amused without paying attention again. He stole that muffin and others directly from our  
demon's inventory.

ቅ ለቅላ፤? – A warning?

ዘግብ ነፍሱ ለቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤ ዓቢኣ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
የቅላቅ'ን የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ ዓቢኣ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
ቅፍቅላ፤ ነፍሱ ስቅላ፤. – You should leave your coward corner and deal  
with this diamond cretin, or I am going to lash out in an effort to teach him some  
manners.

የነፍሱ ዘግብ ለህህህ ይፍቅላ፤ ቅፍቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
ቅፍቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤. ህህ ነፍሱ ለቅላ፤ ስቅላ፤ ለቅላ፤ የቅላቅ'ን  
የቅላቅ'ን የቅላቅ'ን ለቅላ፤ ይፍቅላ፤. – I see you were back there being



# Sliding into Place

## Chapter Summary

Jack is pretty sure he picked the wrong side, and Techno tries very hard not to kill anyone.

## Chapter Notes

This chapter...gave me major issues. And if it were not for Ayonne, I would likely not have been able to get this chapter out for another few weeks. So a heap of thanks to Ayonne for all the help with this chapter!

As always, I hope everyone who read enjoys!

Jack had been in worse situations. He had. After crawling out of his personal hellish limbo, not much phased him. He'd originally come back for one reason and one alone: to get back at the people who had sent him so callously and carelessly down into that hellish limbo. But Wilbur had died without him, and Tommy had gone missing, and bigger problems had cropped up. Bigger, redder, eggier problems.

It was just Jack's luck that by the time he came back from his personal hellish Limbo, he'd return to a server that had become Hell. Or as close as the mortal realm could be. Unlike most of the people on this obviously cursed server, he hadn't fallen to the Egg...easily. He had fought it tooth and nail. He had run with Niki and her group, and he would have likely been on the other side of this stand-off if that group had not contained an entitled child. One attempted murder on the kid, and he had been thrown out by the man Philza Minecraft himself. So he'd sworn to fight and win against the Egg on his own.

He had tried and gotten trapped for his trouble. And then the Egg had offered him vengeance. That or an express trip back to his hellish limbo. Considering the gremlin brat's reaction to Jack's presence back when helping Niki with the food and medical supply run, Tommy didn't remember what the Egg had allowed Jack to do. Or maybe the Egg had let Jack hallucinate what he'd thought he'd done. The bile rose in his throat on cue at the red-tinted memory, and he truly hoped it was the latter. The remembered blood on his hands would be easier to push away if it had all been imagined.

So basically a little prank by Fate itself had kept him from standing on the other side of this stand-off. He could have easily stood in the group opposite him, standing close together in a loose line dozens of blocks outside Ponk's medical hut instead of this group gaggled in front of said hut. If he had more courage and less guilt, he might have asked to join the group last he'd seen Niki. But he couldn't. Tommy had floated over him, cursing and scowling at Jack as if no bad blood had ever been between them. As if Jack had not rejoiced in the kid's utter violation by the Egg. As if Jack had not used that violation to enact the worst of his fantasies.

No. He'd made his bed, and now he'd lie in it. And mentally curse the guys sharing the same bed as him.

"Why did you call us all out here like this?" Sam hissed through his mask. A slapdash one made with recently smelted iron found by Tubbo when the stubborn kid had gone out mining to "clear his head."

"We wanted to make something clear," Dream said. The Admin remained as aloof as ever, back as straight as a ruler and menace in every line of the man's cloaked figure and harshly white mask. "Leave us alone. If you can do that, then we'll leave you alone. If not, then we will be forced to take extreme measures."

"'Extreme measures'? What kind of extreme measures?" Puffy said, leaning a bit too far forward.

"I assume Sapnap is still unconscious."

Both Sam and Puffy tensed, and Jack rolled his eyes. Ponk had made it clear that Sapnap's little nap wasn't natural. He had no physical reason to remain unconscious, but the guy was not waking up. That was George's thing. George who had holed away in his mushroom base/house...thing. Everyone avoided bringing up Sapnap's reaction to the last time the hothead had come from there. The path was decorated with enough burn marks from there to Sapnap's own house in the center of Kinoko for no one to want more.

"He won't wake up unless I run the command," Dream continued glibly. "And you've already lost one member of your group permanently. It wouldn't be good to lose another."

“What—what are you talking about? Duckling, you can’t—”

“Punz is dead,” Dream cut Puffy off. The guy was definitely pulling off menacing excellently. Especially once he pulled up a transparent green screen that could only be one thing: an Admin control panel. “It only took a simple command I’ve recently learned. Would you like a demonstration?”

“You wouldn’t,” Puffy said in horror. “You didn’t. Please tell me you didn’t, Duck—”

“He’s not lying,” Sam said, a high-pitched hiss whistling out either side of his mask. “We saw the death message. And we all know how ruthless the Egg is.”

“So that leaves the question: if I am overtaken by the Egg, why aren’t you all dead?”

Silence fell over both groups. It was a good question. If Dream was under the Egg, why weren’t they all dead? The Egg had no reason to keep them alive. It had the two strongest members of the server under its sway, and one of them was the server’s Admin. Other than for manpower, the Egg did not care about the rest of them. No matter what it had promised any of them, it would have consumed them if that would have achieved its goal of server domination faster. Funny how much easier that was to see when not under the viral effect of the cursed Egg itself.

“So you’re saying instead of an evil Egg, we have an Admin that will kill his players with his powers if they get in his way?” asked Fundy from where he leaned cringing over his crutch. He scooted further behind Ponk when several eyes fell on him.

“He’s not wrong. That might be worse,” the healer said, drawing the eyes away from the scared kid.

“Let’s make one thing clear.” The smiley mask caught the sunlight’s shadow ominously. Jack vaguely wondered if he practiced in the mirror to get that effect just right. “I am the Admin of this server. This,” Dream said gesturing to the area around them. Blocks jutted out of the dirt



to their left and right, making the mountain before them into a mountain range. Flowers broke through the dirt under Niki's group while thorny berry bushes poked up under Sam's hooves. The builder stumbled backward and away from the bushes, and what looked like a hedge of thorny bushes appeared between their group and Niki's.

Chickens poofed into existence in clouds of squawking feathers and float onto their heads. Jack cleverly dodged them along with the rest of their group. A couple managed to lodge in Puffy's hair and pecked the former pirate as she struggled to detangle them from her hair. A flash of movement caught Jack's eye, and he noted that five or six chickens were attempting to nip at Tubbo's tail. Actually now that Jack looked around, most of the chickens were surrounding Sam. Silently. Staring at the guy with red, almost glowing eyes. Chickens couldn't murder anyone, could they? Dream continued his little monologue. "This is all mine."

"You've made your point," said a voice that cut through the squawking murderous chickens and strangely silenced them. But then, if anyone could other than Dream, it would be Technoblade himself. He stood nearer Dream now, a hand holding the masked guy's bicep. Jack squinted. Something about that hold looked strange. Less like the Blade was holding Dream back and more like he was holding him up. But given the way most of Jack's group was being corralled by mute, murderous chickens, Jack figured the only other ones who might have noticed the strange hold were Fundy and Ponk. Speaking of a devil—

"You definitely have," said Ponk, stepping close to the river of berry bushes. The chickens let him through. "Do you want us all to leave your server?"

"That's not what he was trying to say," Niki said. The levelheaded one as always. Unless you ticked her off. Jack missed hanging out with her. She wouldn't have been assaulted by chickens if she was on this side. "What he meant was that if you want to remain on the server, you need to respect that he is its Admin. That's not a lot to ask, is it? He's tried to reason with all of you. And he wasn't aware Punz was on his last life. He is only trying to keep his friends—really all of us, safe."

"But is he?" Sam somehow said calmly from his circle of watching chickens. A flutter of feathers rippled through the living circle. Jack didn't know whether to admire the man or revel in his stupidity. His half demon heritage desired greatly to do the later. "Are you sure that he is not a threat to the server? That he is doing all this in an effort to protect it? Can you prove with one hundred percent certainty that he isn't acting on some taint leftover from the Egg?"

“Dude, seriously?! What do you want him to do?” asked Skeppy, coming out from somewhere to the side. Jack vaguely wondered why he hadn’t noticed the literally shiny diamond golem. “Give you his Admin powers so you can check his code yourself?”

“He can do that?” Fundy asked, sticking his head out from behind Ponk again.

“No. I mean...sort of, but it’s complicated. Not everyone can handle Admin powers,” Skeppy said. “Point is, is anything going to convince you guys?”

“They could view my code,” Dream said quietly. He almost sounded vulnerable, but then he tilted his mask a few degrees too far and continued. “A moderator could make my code visible to normal Players.”

“But you’ve never revealed who the moderators were,” Puffy said. “Duckling, we’re not going to believe someone on your side. You have to understand—”

“George is a moderator,” Dream interrupted. “He is part of Kinoko.”

“What? George is a moderator? But then why didn’t he—?”

“You’ll have to ask him yourself,” Dream said darkly. Puffy’s mouth shut and stayed closed. Her gaze flittered lacrosse the other group, landing a moment longer on Niki who avoided her gaze with a resolute look. Jack didn’t know when the last time the fierce captain had looked so lost.

“Well, I guess that’s that,” Skeppy jumped. “Let’s find George and get this figured out then. Is he still back in that mushroom house near Kinoko?”

“How did you know he lives in a mushroom house?” demanded Sam. “Have you had contact with him?”

Jack rolled his eyes. This conversation was dragging on too long for his attention span.

“IMaybe he heard it while you two decided to stand in front of his cell chatting,” Jack scoffed. He might have kept his mouth shut, but he felt like if he did, they’d continue going nowhere. “According to Punz, Sapnap couldn’t ever keep his mouth shut around our prisoner. Guy was really worried that the prisoner knew too much.”

Hissing smoke escaped the makeshift gas mask, and Jack mentally measured the blocks between him and Sam. He was out of the blast zone. He smirked and shrugged.

“I’m not wrong.”

“Sappy’s always been chatty when he’s nervous,” said Skeppy, drawing the burning black-sclera gaze away from Jack. Jack didn’t mind. Though given the slight dimming of the diamond skin’s glow, Skeppy might.

“You know, I’m starting to think you want us to be infected,” Niki said, moving around Skeppy to match Sam’s glare. “That there’s no reasoning with you. With any of you, except Ponk and Jack. And maybe Tubbo. We’re willing to go get a moderator you’ll trust to check Dream out, but that’s still not enough. I’m half convinced to make Dream ban you from the server and be done with it.”

“We just want to be sure,” Puffy said, reentering the conversation from nowhere. This thing was really never going to end. “You understand that, don’t you, Niki?”

“Take it or leave it,” Niki said, crossing her arms and not turning her glare away from Sam. Because she was Niki, Sam’s green pupils had skittered away from her.

“Fine,” Sam agreed, and Jack sighed audibly. That had taken way too long. And now they had to go find George. He wondered if he could convince the others he should stay here with Ponk. Jack decided that he was done following suicidal idiots. Next time the rest of the server decided to take on Niki’s group, he was staying home.

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“You agree you will be satisfied if George looks through my code,” Dream bit out. He was tense. He didn’t like the creeper, but given what had been said about the prison and the creeper’s part in it, that checked out. Techno kept his arm where it was in order to keep the overgrown squealer from falling over as the idiot tried to be intimidating. Weird part was that he was succeeding. Were the Kinoko fools even looking at the same idiot he was?

“We agree,” the pirate captain said. “If you would release Sam from the thorns and wake Sapnap, we’ll head back to George’s house right now.”

“And where is that?” asked Techno, stepping forward and a little ahead of Dream while not moving his arm. The overgrown squealer gave him a displeased glance with his mask. Unfortunately for him, Techno was immune. Dream grumbled at the lack of response but grew less tense.

“Back in Kinoko,” Wilbur’s kit, Fundy Chat confirmed, said less shakily. He was still hiding behind the healer. “Or close by.”

“And what is Georgie up to?” Tommy asked, leaning back on thin air above Techno and Dream’s heads. The gremlin appeared to be taking his job as lookout seriously. Not that Techno had needed his whispered warning when the creeper hybrid had lunged.

“He’s sleeping,” Tubbo said. The first thing the kid had said this whole time. Finding out the best friend you were trying to save willingly played bait in a trap for you and yours had to be difficult. Techno understood how it was to be betrayed, but he doubted that Tubbo wanted the guy who scarred his face commiserating with him.

“Ha. Figures. That’s all that b\*\*\*\*\* does,” Tommy said, doing a flip weightless in the air. The goat kid weirdly perked up at the gremlin’s tone. “So which of us is going?”

“Bad, Techno, you and me,” said Dream bluntly. Techno gave an acquiescing grunt, and Tommy flipped once more and shrugged. Halo slithered out of the shadow in the background

he'd been hiding in. Tubbo and the rest of the "erstwhile enemies" stiffened.

"Maybe I should stay here," said the former eggperor. Because he had to prove over and over he was Dream's parent. The two mirrored each other disgustingly.

"If Dream said you should go, you should go," Skeppy encouraged brightly. Ever going with whatever would either irritate or serve Halo best. "And I should go with you."

Techno did not smack the nearby golem, but it was a close thing.

"No," Dream said firmly. "We need you to stay here. In case someone else tries something."

Skeppy's black eyes shone as emptily as most people assumed they did. Techno rolled his eyes and then noticeably cocked his head towards Niki. The diamond fighter caught the movement and frowned.

"But I want to go with Bad," Skeppy whined.

"Skeppy, we'll be right back," the former eggperor soothed. No one had to wonder where the demon's endless patience came from after meeting his best friend. Phil had...had often said that the only ones who could deal with the hyper fighter for long periods were Halo and Techno. Halo because he could out-patient and soothe the excitable moron while Techno could keep up with the guy's hyperness and straight up out-annoy him.

"Why can't Techno stay? Isn't he the back-up Admin at this point?"

Dream grew rigid, and Techno sent his most withering glare at the diamond fighter.

"Why would Techno be the back-up Admin? Did Dream give him some of his Admin powers like you mentioned earlier?" asked Fundy. Chat, that had been a low buzz, went crazy, and Techno's glare twitched. Skeppy tried to keep up his ignorant act, but he fidgeted.

“Sapnap did mention something about Techno being able to mess with barrier blocks,” the annoying half-demon (Jake maybe?) said. Techno noted from the corner of his eye that the half-demon’s red and blue glasses had focused on Techno. “And he seemed upset about it.”

Apparently the former eggperor had joined him in glaring at the big-mouthed idiot. Skeppy twitched and dully fluttered.

“Does that mean the Technoblade is an Admin now? Because Dream made him one,” asked Tubbo, genuine fear seeping into the question. The familiar weight of guilt settled in Techno’s gut and made his glare harsher. Skeppy crumbled and stepped back over to where Niki stood. The guilt grew heavier. The guy hadn’t meant to spill something that didn’t need spilling.

“My Admin status has nothing to do with this idiot,” Techno snorted loudly. “See, back when the underdone omelet was trying to take over the server with as many minions as it could win over, it tried to win Phil over. But Phil’s not the kind of guy to believe empty twisted promises, so it failed.” The idiots’ flinches had Chat spamming “L’s” in amusement and made him smirk. He ignored the flinch from the demon beside him. “But Phil realized it wouldn’t stop trying, and that there are other ways to get into an Admin’s code outside of invitation since this wasn’t his server and all. So he thought his Admin powers might be better hidden in my code.”

“So you can transfer Admin powers?” Fundy asked in shock.

“How did you think I made XD?” said Dream, shuffling to stand shoulder to shoulder with Techno. XD? That name sounded familiar. “And Phil wasn’t wrong.”

“XD?” Fundy asked with a twitching nose. But his curiosity went ignored as another question shakily hissed out.

“What...what happened to Phil? Is he...dead?” Tubbo didn’t direct the question at anyone, his watery eyes unfocused. The goat kid’s hands were clenched into fists. Techno vaguely remembered Phil joking about finding Tubbo on the side of the road in a box despite rarely interacting with the kid. But Phil had also joked about how Wilbur adopting Tommy as a

brother meant he was also Phil's kid despite never talking one-on-one to the gremlin before the undone omelet. Techno had usually assumed the man had a terrible sense of humor and moved on. He never acted like a real father to the two boys. He didn't even act like he was Wilbur's sometimes. And Phil joked about being Techno's dad too despite them meeting each other after both were adults. But given the goat kid's reaction to being told Phil was dead, maybe there was something to Phil's joking in that case. And maybe Tommy's given the dark frown.

"Does Ghostbur know?" Tubbo whispered.

"Of course Wilbur knows. He was with Techno and the others when they came to find Dream. He even said he was with them because Phil sent him," grumbled Tommy. "He knows Phil's dead."

"Guess he didn't see the need to tell the random goat kid," Tubbo said. The kid's ears pressed into his light blond hair. Techno winced.

"The guy isn't all there," Techno said casually. "He likely didn't think of it. I mean, he apparently convinced you all that we tortured him the whole time he was with us."

He watched carefully as the pirate captain and Fundy's faces twisted in confusion, Ponk's and the half-demon's settled into resigned understanding, Tubbo's stretched into muted horror, and the creeper's impassive expression sharpened into anger.

"So you're daring to say you didn't do anything to him," the creeper hissed.

"Considering he was with me the most, and I did nothing," Techno said clearly. "Then, yeah, that's exactly what I'm saying."

"He said that his sheep named Friend is his sixth Friend," the pirate captain said slowly, going through the idea out loud. Good. Best to know how much of Wilbur exactly was left. "That he didn't like going inside because he went inside with you, he had to stay there. That Friends died when he didn't listen to people. That he hurt when he didn't listen to people."

Ah. Looked like enough Wilbur was left. Enough for him to be up to his old tricks. The man was always a master at words. At saying enough to let people fill in gaps with what they wanted to think. And even those he'd proven willing to fool would drop their guard around an amnesiac, "innocent" ghost. One that appeared to be Wilbur back when he was his most idealistic and kind. How much of that younger Wilbur had been a ploy? He rarely saw the kid outside of when he was behaving for Phil or when Phil was praising Wilbur to kingdom come. And Phil loved his kid to death. Techno knew what that kind of love could blind you to.

"F\*\*\*\* Wilbur," Tommy burst, and everyone stopped to stare at where he floated above Dream. He glared at them all. "He *lied* . Like he always does."

"We did nothing to Ghostbur," Niki said, stepping to slide between the Syndicate and the Kinoko idiots. "He came to help us find Dream because he said Phil sent him. Then he disappeared after we got back to our base. He spent the most time with Techno."

The idiots turned to him, and he instantly wondered what he'd done to Niki to earn her anger. Instead of dwelling on how Chat was flying with accusations and theories and E, Techno thought back to his conversations with Wil's supposed ghost.

There'd been off, but he'd originally attributed that to the whole being-a-ghost thing. He hadn't met the gremlin in ghost form at that point, so he hadn't had a lot of experience with ghosts. Wil's ghost had asked seemingly endless questions about Dream and his powers and Techno's thoughts on both. He'd occasionally comment about how Phil missed him, and how the ghost wanted to go back to Phil but couldn't. Said a bit about how Dream's powers seemed unfair too. How maybe Dream could bring Phil back if he was so powerful but chose not to. Techno inwardly snorted dismissively at the memory and Chat's repeated chant of censored phrases and affirmatives. No Admin was powerful enough to do that, not even on his own server.

"Techno?" the former eggperor asked. Techno blinked up at the worried, dark face. Wil had seemed especially interested in his anger at Halo after they had *finally* found Dream. Had kept dreamily pointing out that Halo seemed especially close to Dream. As close as Techno was—had been to Phil. The comparison had had more of an effect than he'd wanted to admit at the time. Chat E'd and L'd.



“Yeah, there was something off,” said Techno with a shrug. “Hindsight’s 20/20.”

“You sure you didn’t f\*\*\*\* with him?” the half-demon asked. Techno leveled a blood-red stare at him as the former eggperor muttered “language.” The guy shut up. Chat did not.

“I’ll stay here,” Ponk said. The healer started back to the make-shift hospital. “Someone should watch the slumbering patient.”

“Didn’t our Admin agree to wake him up?” the creeper hybrid hissed. The berry bush thorns had unwound from around the creeper hybrid’s legs, and Sam had stomped to less pokey ground. He now stood in Ponk’s way. The healer turned to Dream with a raised eyebrow, and Techno huffed as everyone followed the healer’s example. The overgrown squealer shifted his feet slightly under their joint gaze. For a man who liked to grab people’s attention, he seemed to crumble under it a lot.

“This has taken too long already. I won’t wake him until we’ve met with Georgenotfound,” Dream said steadily. Not that Techno was fooled. He was close enough to see the fingers clenching into the inside of the “mysterious” cloak. “After you can clarify with him that we are not under the Egg’s influence, I will wake Sapnap up.”

“Why?” the pirate captain said with suspicion across her face.

“Because if he attacks us one more time, I don’t think I can keep Techno from killing him and taking his last life,” Dream said matter-of-factly. Catching the curly-haired woman’s eyes, Techno made sure to smile wide and show his teeth. Chat eagerly shouted threats and taunts that the pirate captain couldn’t hear. He mentally saved a few for later.

“As if you care,” the creeper hybrid scoffed. Chat roared for his head, and Techno considered using the “weak-to-peer-pressure” excuse to slice the irritating man’s head off. Not like it was a lie. Sure last time he’d scarred a child for life, but the creeper hybrid was no child. And Dream didn’t seem like he’d mind. The former eggperor might though, since they were in the same country at some point. And Niki would no doubt say something about how beheading someone wouldn’t help their case with the Kinoko fools.

*Fine* . He told Chat off and crossed his arms to keep from lunging at the especially suicidal fool.

“Sam, it might be best if you stay here,” Tubbo said, an echo of authority in his voice. “Just in case this is a trap or if they mean for those who stay to attack Sapnap and Ponk while we’re gone.”

The creeper hybrid heavily examined Tubbo, but the kid just kept a bland straight face. A puff of hissing smoke escaped both ends of the creeper hybrid’s mask. He brushed or shook off the remnants of berry bush branches.

“Puffy,” the creeper hybrid said in a deep exhale. The former pirate captain locked eyes with the creeper hybrid. (So her name was Puffy. He should have remembered that. Niki had mentioned her.) “I will trust you to report on the situation. Make sure our young friend doesn’t go too far.”

“Got it. You can trust me,” said Puffy. She gave the creeper hybrid a salute and a cocky smile. “I’ll make sure to thoroughly check George’s findings and bring Tubbo back in one piece.”

The creeper hybrid hissed out smoke one more time and then turned and limped towards the makeshift hospital. The movement had Ponk hurrying over to him, and Fundy followed the healer without a word. Neither of the other two tried to stop him. After the three entered the tiny hospital, the tension in Dream’s shoulders eased slightly. Without a word, he walked purposefully in the direction to the left of the tiny hospital. Techno quickly stepped in tandem with him, and he registered Halo’s movements at the edge of his vision. The former eggperor whispered something to Skeppy and then followed them as inconspicuously as possible. Skeppy waved goodbye in large motions as Niki mouthed “stay safe” with a small wave.

The two Kinoko idiots remaining followed them. Dream lead them to the edge of the snow-covered ground and into a birch forest. The sun rose higher as they exited the white wood and into a large meadow where Dream picked up the pace. Techno matched the other Admin’s stride, and oddly the former eggperor did not struggle to keep up. The other two did struggle.

“You should f\*\*\*\* slow down, or you’re going to leave the b\*\*\*\*\* you want to convince behind,” Tommy said from where he floated easily over them.

“You calling Puffy a b\*\*\*\*?” Dream said easily.

“It’s not like I’m lying,” Tommy said.

“Language,” Halo grumbled audibly from behind them. Techno did appreciate how the man’s censorship quickly shushed Chat when the swearing whipped them up into a frenzy. The former eggperor was good for Techno’s monetization if nothing else.

“How far are we?” Techno said. “Because if we have to worry about those two the whole way, this trip might become an overnight one.”

“I was planning to sneakily teleport us once we found a dark enough place,” Dream whispered.

“Huh. Sounds like a plan. And how are we going to get to a dark place?”

“I was going to run into a cave. Bad can make it dark enough from there.”

“Sure,” the former eggperor said with a weary smile. “But we might want to find one soon. I don’t think Puffy and Tubbo are going to last.”

Looking back at them, the two were already panting hard. No wonder they were such easy prey for the undone omelet.

“Fine,” Dream gritted. He slipped into the code and ran a command. A cave miraculously appeared in the distance just as they needed it. They ran into it with the wheezing Tubbo and winded former pirate captain. They exited the cave’s darkness and walked into the middle of a forest glade near a partially overgrown path. Dream stepped onto the path and walked where it lead deeper into the swampy grove. The path met a better paved one, and a sun-dappled grove stretched in front of them.

The vine-wrapped trees surrounded the decent-sized mushroom cottage. Mushrooms of all sorts grew along the path, and there was a small pond a dozen blocks outside of the large glass window on one side of the white and red building. Honestly, Techno thought Phil would be impressed by the layout and landscaping of the cottage. Seemed like something he might have attempted for fun.

Dream paused at the edge of the paved path and stilled completely. He wasn't breathing. Again. The overgrown squealer lucked out that they came along, because he definitely had been in dire need of better friends if the reaction to this cottage was near the same as the one he'd had for the prison. Techno squealed deep and low enough for Dream to hear. Thankfully the overgrown squealer responded to the call, unlike back when he was surrounded by lava and obsidian. Speaking of which, they still had to return and raze that cursed place to the ground.

"One of you should go in and get him," Dream said, shifting to let his mask loom in the direction of the Kinoko fools while also brushing his shoulder against Techno's arm. Techno snorted that no one was going to volunteer. He wasn't wrong.

"You should go in," said the woman who hurt Niki deeply. She stepped a step too close to Dream. The overgrown squealer's breathing hitched, and Techno stared at the former pirate captain. She stepped back. "He-We all know he misses you. If you really are free of the Egg's influence, then you'd care about that."

No one said anything. They were all staring at Dream and waiting again. Except the former eggperor. He slipped up from where he'd been skulking behind them and took position over Dream's other shoulder. Then Halo whispered quiet enough that if Techno hadn't had Piglin hearing, he would have heard nothing.

"You don't have to if you don't want to. I can go instead."

Techno snorted a firm no. Both glanced sideways at him, and he gave a grumbling growl. The idiots would assume Halo had coerced Dream into letting the former eggperor go instead. And none of them would believe the undone omelet had nothing to do with the decision. Recently Techno would have suspected some ulterior motive in the demon's offer himself. But after the look on the demon's face after he'd shot the idiot he called son, Techno's

suspensions had evaporated. The undone omelet would never have been able to feign such heartbreak. And yet despite the heartbreak the former eggperor had stood firm. He'd had their back. So the least Techno could do was have his.

"Techno is right. It...it has to be me," Dream whispered back.

"You know I haven't seen Gogy in a long time." The gremlin floated down right into Techno's head. He shook it and stepped aside. Tommy took the opening to hover next to Dream and grab an arm. He pulled Dream away from Halo, and his voice, unlike the former eggperor, was loud. "Why don't I go and wake up sleeping f\*\*\*\*\* beauty in there?"

Huh. Perhaps the gremlin had picked something up from Wilbur after all...Or he had been spending too much time with Dream. One or the other.

"Language! And I was telling Dream I could go," Halo offered in a believably angry grumble.

"Yeah. But Gogy's not going to wake up to your ugly mug. He'll see it, think he's in a nightmare, roll over, and try to go back to sleep."

"Why would he try to go back if he thought it was a nightmare?" There was genuine confusion in the Halo's question.

"Because that's how you wake up when you're sleeping," Tommy said with a obvious "duh" in his tone. Halo barely kept from rolling his eyes, and he bit out a fair comeback.

"Is that what you do when you see yourself in the mirror in the mornings?"

Tommy's face blanked with shock, and Dream's shoulders shook in an attempt not to break the invented tension between the two. Techno didn't bother and laughed heartily. The two verbal combatants twisted towards him, and he clapped Halo in the back hard enough to knock him off balance.

“You’ve utterly destroyed him. So now the least you can do is let him go wake up the guy roleplaying as sleeping beauty.”

Halo’s face cringed before molding into a disgruntled expression.

“Fine. But if he doesn’t wake him up, then I get a turn.”

“Of course. Of course,” Techno said loudly. Halo’s lips twisted between a stretched scowl and a guilt-heavy frown, and his brow furrowed and pinched together. He looked close to blurting out an apology, so Techno kept talking. “You should get going Tommy before our former eggperor here changes his mind.”

“No,” Tommy groaned, pulling a hand down his transparent face. “Don’t tell me you’re going to start using that f\*\*\*\*\* name too.”

“What name?” Tubbo asked from closer than any of the other idiots and louder than the grumbled “language.” The goat kid hadn’t learned a single bit of subtlety from Wilbur or Schlatt and had been obviously eavesdropping the whole time. Chat wanted to indulge him, so Techno complied.

“I believe our favorite ghost here isn’t fond of the nickname you came up with for our lovely demon here.”

“You mean ‘the eggperor’?” Tubbo said way too brightly. His chest even puffed out a bit. “I came up with that on a whim. Come on, Tom. You can’t argue that it’s brilliant.”

Tommy scowled and turned blatantly to the house, and the goat kid’s smile fell. Eh. It’d take more than one conversation to smooth over betrayal like the goat kid’s. If Chat didn’t keep pointing out the scar covering half the kid’s face, he’d likely not even let the goat kid close. But he owed Tubbo a little more leeway. At least the goat kid wasn’t releasing withers on them. Which given that Tommy betrayed him right back, Tubbo had a definite right to do.

“Be back in two minutes,” Tommy said and floated into the cottage. The goat kid frowned and adopted a kicked puppy look.

“Um...,” Halo said, clearing his throat. “You might want to give him a little time and space. He’s...still a bit salty about you being a Kinoko spy.”

The goat kid’s sadness soured, and he bared his teeth in a snarl. He stopped himself right before he spit out some curse. Instead the kid’s snarl curled into a neutral expression.

“Hard to believe he won’t give me the time of day, but he suddenly has no problem talking to the guy who literally helped the Egg twist itself into his personal code.”

Halo flinched, and Dream bristled. Chat chanted, “Fight.” Techno vaguely wondered if he could get away with taking out some baked potato chips he’d made and munching on them. Nah. Chat’d go crazy and the fools might turn their attention to him next. He’d had enough of their attention.

“Hard to believe for someone who wasn’t there when Tommy was being put back together piece by piece,” Dream said deceptively evenly. “Bad was there. You weren’t.”

“I would have been there!” Tubbo shouted. “If I had known, I would have been!”

“He went to you later,” Dream said, voice viciously low. “But you let your guilt blind you, so he had no choice but to come back to us.”

“I thought he was a ghost come to haunt me!”

“He is a ghost,” Techno said, adding fuel to the fire. The goat kid’s face was a burning red. He plopped a hand on Dream’s shoulder which flinched. “And if he’s haunting anyone, it’d

be Dream here. Too bad for him that our Admin seems to like him being around, so the haunting isn't very effective."

"Tommy's my best friend! If I had known he was—"

"You knew Ghostbur," Dream said, slipping out from under Techno's hand. Techno let him go, but watched him closer. The overgrown squealer was hunched in on himself, and that did not bode well. "Was Tommy being a ghost that surprising?"

"What happened to Wilbur and what happened to Tommy were two very different things," the goat kid chuffed. "Wilbur died. Tom—Tommy was..." A choked sob kept the goat kid from finishing. He tried again and managed a whisper. "People don't come back from what happened to Tom."

"Too bad. I lived b\*\*\*\*."

The goat kid let a short bleat and spun to lock eyes with an unamused gremlin.

"Tom! We—"

"Were talking about me," said Tommy. "As long as it isn't s\*\*\*\*, I don't care."

"Language," Halo muttered annoyed. Techno had to give the demon credit. He had amazing self-restraint. Techno would have found a way to get the kid to self-destruct for his constant cursing if he were Halo. Normally he would have threatened the gremlin into silence, but since Chat found Halo's frustration more fun to focus on than the gremlin's colorful language, Techno saw no reason to do anything but sit back and enjoy the show.

"Bossman, I—" Tubbo started.



“Gogy’s awake,” the gremlin spoke over him. “Might want to go in and get this over with. He didn’t seem like he wanted to stay awake.”

“Let’s go,” Dream said. His breath paused, but Halo moved close enough to bump an arm on the overgrown squealer’s shoulder, and Techno snorted a short assent. Tommy floated back through the cottage, leaving them with a despondent kid. Dream followed through the door with less than a second of hesitation.

Techno caught Halo’s conflicted gaze. He tilted his head slightly in the goat kid’s direction. Halo blinked and then sadly shook his head. Snorting softly, Techno matched the demon’s step as they followed Dream into the cottage. He caught sight of the strangely quiet pirate captain putting an arm around a slumped Tubbo. Neither of the two entered behind them.

They barely made it in through the door before being treated to the sight of Dream being draped over by a mushroom-hatted man Techno assumed was the infamous Georgenotfound. He’d never seen the guy in person, so he could only guess. He blinked and viewed the guy’s code as Dream grew stiffer.

No undone omelet red. Only a mess of blues with random brown, gold, and white numbers laced into them. He squinted at the mess to see if he could better layout the code in his head. A throat cleared, and as he turned away from the messy code, a familiar bundle of code hovered in his vision. Halo held what could only be a pair of glasses in his hand. Snuffling an embarrassed thanks for the reminder, Techno withdrew his own pair and placed it on his nose to the tune of various Chat’s worst blind jokes.

...how was this guy alive? From what he had learned of code from both Phil and Dream, no person should be able to function with this many strung together codes. Personal codes are not supposed to be block based. The whole code should flow together. But none of this code flowed. It tripped over itself and spun around in swirls of numbers. He was getting a headache trying to make out the base blocks for this man. He’d thought the mess of that Admin placeholder was bad because its code flowed into and out of the world around them, but this one was completely insane.

“Stop, Techno,” said Dream, hand on Techno’s elbow. Techno turned to the Admin, and the gradient of greens soothed his soul. “George’s code shows how often he’s been a moderator. He’s one of the best at it.”

“Halo is also a moderator,” Techno said blandly, focusing on keeping his breakfast in his stomach. Niki had worked hard on it.

“I’m a demon,” Halo said. He placed a hand in between Techno’s shoulder blades. A pulse of foreign energy rippled through Techno and settled his stomach. “My code bends better with worlds’ codes. It’s probably why the Egg came to me first.”

“You chose a back-up Admin at last,” said another voice. Dream straightened away from Techno. The mushroom-hatted mess of code stepped around Dream to examine Techno from behind black-lensed goggles. “I didn’t know the great Technoblade was also an Admin.”

“It’s a recent development.”

“Because Phil’s gone?” The blithe tone of the mess of code had Techno blinking and narrowing his eyes. “The server gave me the notice in my sleep. Been sleeping to keep modding despite the Egg. It was happy to let me do my job as long as I reported to it.”

“It was,” Halo said. He stood closer to the mess of code. “It’s good to see you, George.”

“Wish I could say the same,” George said. He barely glanced at the former eggperor, and Techno felt himself bristling. Chat didn’t like the response either. Calls of hypocrite and two of a kind filled Techno’s head. Techno snorted out a short growl that would go unheard by human ears, and the mess of code seemed to have human ears. So did Dream, but the demon glanced back at him. His tail flicked, and the white-coded mouth curved at its edges. “But I am glad to see that none of you are infected anymore.”

“You say that like you weren’t infected,” Techno grumbled.

“I wasn’t. Not fully. Kinda hard for a virus to rewrite my code. That’s kind of the point of it,” the mess of code said. “It’s what makes me a good moderator. Why Dream said I’m one of the best.”

The mess of code's chest puffed out a bit and smirked.

"All of my moderators are the best of the best," Dream said blandly. "Which is why the Egg getting on the server should never have happened."

"It wouldn't have if Bad hadn't given into it," said the mess of code as the smirk fell into a scowl.

"Probably," Dream conceded. "But how did it get in in the first place? Weren't you in charge of keeping bugs and viruses off the server?"

"Callahan took over when I went to spy for you as one of Schlatt's vice presidents. Thought it would be best if someone more focused took that job."

"But you chose not to inform me?"

The scowl beneath the tinted goggles tightened. "You had a lot on your mind. I thought you trusted me to do my job."

"I did," said Dream. He slipped his arms under his cloak, and his body language became near impossible to read. To anyone who didn't understand the overgrown squealer's need for dramatics. "I trusted you to do your job. Not Callahan."

The cottage appeared to darken.

"Callahan could handle it," the mess of code defended.

"If he could have, then we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Goggles and mask faced each other, and Techno took stock of the open doorway behind them. None of the Kinoko group had come in. Not even Tubbo. Chat buzzed and beeped warnings. Techno bounced his attention between the two former friend's standoff and the door. No one came closer to the door.

"Are you two going to stand there and stare at each other all day? Because I'm bored." Tommy once again floated over Dream's head. Dream looked up and away from George to the gremlin casually leaning back on nothing.

"Wouldn't want you to be bored," Dream said, his voice lighter. "Who knows the chaos you'd cause."

"Exactly," Tommy said, flipping onto his stomach. "Just get Gogy to give you the all clear with the others before I decide to do an encore and burn Gogy's house again."

"I made sure this one was fireproof," the mess of code said. He paused looking upward. "Did you bring him back?"

"Yes," Dream said.

"I thought you hated each other."

"Things change whether you decide to be f\*\*\*\* awake for it or not," said Tommy. Halo grumbled his usual reprimand, and the mess of code frowned. "So, you going to tell the others we're not all omelet brains or what?"

"Or what," the mess of code answered. "I'm not going out there until Dream answers one question."

"What? Really? You'll let the entire server believe that we're still brainwashed?!"

“Only if Dream doesn’t answer the question.” The mess of code refocused on Dream. “You said you hated us. Me and Sapnap. Why? What did we do?”

# You Can't Return the Way You Came

## Chapter Summary

Bad didn't want to hear the answer to George's question, but he will stand behind whatever decision Dream makes. George wants to know why Dream abandoned them, and he'll only help Dream afterwards. Neither of them fully get what they want.

## Chapter Notes

A ton of thanks to Ayonne for continuing to beta this story!

To everyone still reading this story, thank you. Glad so many of you are still enjoying!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Bad hated seeing Dream and George like this. For Bad, the two's friendship had mirrored his and Skeppy's more closely than even Dream and Sapnap's. Or so he had always thought. He'd mentioned it to Skeppy once, but Skeppy hadn't liked the comparison. Maybe because Sapnap wasn't involved. But Sappy was his own person. Then again, so was Dream. And George. It wasn't fair to compare them, and Bad shouldn't have done it.

Still Bad felt safe saying that Dream and George were as close as he and Skeppy. Or they had been. Best friends who would raze the world for each other. But maybe that time had ended when the world that would have been razed was Dream's own. Dream had always taken his responsibilities seriously, no matter how reckless and flippant he liked to act. And he loved so fiercely. Bad wanted to know exactly what had caused Dream to push his two best friends away.

He didn't think this was the best time to learn.

“George, I don't think—”

“Shut the f\*\*\*\*\* up!” snapped George. Bad recoiled at the venom in the young moderator’s voice. He’d forgotten how vicious George could be when he—when he hated someone. “No one asked you!”

The temperature dropped.

“Well, that’s that, I guess,” Techno said. He huffed as he took his place next to Dream. “This is a dead end. We’ll have to think of something else. Did you pick any other moderators other than Georgie-Porgie over here and Halo?”

“Stay out of this!” George shouted. “This is between me and Dream!”

“See, I get it, my dear Gogy. I do,” Tommy said, floating down to lay mid-air between them and George’s goggled glare. “You want one-on-one time with Dreamie. But trust me, it’s not happening. This lot are the clingiest set of b\*\*\*\*\* I’ve ever seen.”

Bad groaned and kept his “language” to a low grumble, wishing the boy would stop. The shadows were roaring through him, and he was having a hard enough time keeping them in check.

“Get out,” George growled. “I don’t—there was no point in waking me up. Go find Callahan or someone else, and never come back here.”

Bad’s tail flickered anxiously as George gave them his back and strode to the doorway that likely led to his bedroom. The demon bit his lip, trying not to call after him. George wouldn’t listen to him. But they couldn’t leave like this. They shouldn’t. Dream *and* George would regret—

“Fine,” Dream grit out. They all turned to him in various levels of shock. George’s eyebrows even appeared over his goggles. “You want to know what you did? I’ll tell you.”

Dream marched back to the entrance and shut the door. Bad vaguely wondered what the two outside would think about the private pow-wow, but he decided they'd worry about it later. He still didn't think now was the best time for Dream to try to explain, but Bad wasn't going to stop him. No time would be the "best time," and if Dream wanted to finally get it off his chest—

Dream marched up to a table set in the middle of the room and sat down. He gestured to the chair across the table as his mask pointed at George. The dark lenses hid the other moderator's eyes, but Bad was pretty sure they were rolling. He walked to the only other chair at the table and plopped into it. Dream snorted softly, and Techno definitely rolled his eyes. But the large piglin hybrid huffed something back and sat on the floor next to Dream. The warrior was so large that his head almost came level with Dream's head.

Bad quietly snickered at the scene until Dream tilted his mask at both him and Tommy. Tommy shrugged and floated up to sit cross-legged over the table, and Bad weighed his options. A glint of green flickered at him from behind the edge of the mask, an eye peeking a plea out from porcelain. Bad instinctively moved to sit on Dream's other side. He was tall enough that even sitting on the floor his head was far above wild blond hair, but he let his side brush lightly along Dream's. A reminder that he was right there and not leaving. Not unless Dream wanted him too.

The intensity of the lensed glare from the other side of the table shook Bad's resolve. His presence was likely not helping George's mood. But Dream wanted him here, so he would stay. He wrapped his tail discretely over Dream's foot. His tail couldn't do what Ranboo and Ender's could, but hopefully the weight helped Dream remember he wasn't alone. Not that the motion didn't steady Bad's nerves as well.

"So? You going to answer my question or what?" George said hotly.

"You abandoned me," Dream said without any audible hesitation.

"What?" George said blankly, but he shook visibly. "*We* abandoned *you* ?"

"Tommy burned down your house, so you came to me and demanded I get back at him for you. And I did. I went to New L'Manberg and got Tubbo to agree to house arrest as a punishment, but as expected Tommy didn't—"



“What are you talking about?!” George exclaimed. “You weren’t here when Tommy burned down my house! You’d already left to f\*\*\*\*\* knows where, and Eret had to get justice for me. And now you want to sit there and take credit for that?! Besides, you told us you hated us before Tommy grieved my house.”

“It was not before for me,” Dream said evenly. His hands had clenched into shaking fists under the table. Bad leaned against Dream’s side gently. The tremors vibrated where his arm met Dream’s side, but they faded as Dream took a subtle, deep breath. “By the time Schlatt fell, I had overseen Tommy’s exile and watched as you and Sapnap decided not to have anything more to do with me.”

“How? That’s impossible! Me and Sapnap have never—” George burst. Bad’s heart sunk at hearing the young moderator’s—at hearing George’s desperation.

“The Egg had Karl.”

George hesitated and then more casually asked, “So?”

“Remember when I said I thought Karl’s joke about timing sounded weirdly accurate? I was right.”

A sagging weariness fell over George.

“He’s a time traveler?”

The tremors returned as Dream nodded. As imperceptibly as he could, Bad laid a hand on the nearest of Dream’s fists. Dream leaned slightly onto Bad’s arm.

George leaned further back into his chair and gave an audible groan.

“So you hate us because of something that never happened?”

“It happened,” Dream said firmly. “And I wasn’t going to just stand there and let it happen again.”

“You don’t know that,” George defended, and Bad heard the strain in the seemingly firm tone. “You can’t.”

“Tell me, George,” Dream said, slipping his fist out from under Bad’s hand. He leaned forward, chin on both hands and shadows eerily obscuring his mask. “Where were you?”

“What?” George did not splutter, but he did purse his lips like he did when his words slipped out without his say-so. They rarely did, and Bad remembered days where Dream and Sapnap would have pointed the tell out and teased George about losing his cool. When the other two would laugh until George said exactly the right thing to put them down. And then they’d all start trying to one-up each other verbally followed by some silly challenge they would all three compete at. Eventually the three would make up after collapsing exhausted in a heap of semi-tangled limbs. Sometimes they’d even dragged Bad into it. “Where was I when?”

“When the Egg started taking over the server.”

“Here,” George said with continued venom in his voice. Not playful and put-upon, but seriously aimed to hurt. “Doing damage control. Ever wonder why the Egg had a hard time capturing Techno’s little group? Why Phil and Techno managed to make their way back to your little safe bubble base?”

The Egg had seemed frustrated when Techno and the others slipped through its vines. It had suspected the interference had come from the Admin himself. Or so it had told Bad. But it had also seemed to hold George unconscious for longer times after that.

“And before that?”

“Before what? The Egg? You told us you hated us,” George said. “What did you want us to do? Magically read your mind, find your base, and warn you of a threat you knew was coming and we didn’t?”

“Ant and Bad still had their compasses,” Dream said. His arms quavered under his leaning weight, and he nonchalantly shifted his weight back fully onto the chair. Bad wished he could scan Dream’s code himself. He could, but Dream was in weak enough of a state that if Bad did, he might crumble under the thorough scan. And if he didn’t for Bad’s scan, he would definitely for George’s. And that had to happen to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt Dream wasn’t Eggy. Better to gently and quietly transfer some more of his own vitality to Dream. The muffinhead had overdone it with that display of power with the berry bushes, mountains, and chickens. The chickens in particular had been terrifying.

“So? They were the first ones to be taken over by the Egg,” George said, voice hard and icy.

“Which meant you shouldn’t have left compasses pointed straight towards the server’s Admin with them,” Dream said. His code tried to block Bad’s vitality transfer, but Bad tapped into his own demonic nature. The protective, agitated shadows in Bad’s core eagerly slithered their way into Dream through the most miniscule chinks they could find in Bad’s legionnaire’s stubborn defense and strengthened Dream’s code from within. This third time some of them failed entirely and returned in rejected-wrath back to his core. Dream needed to finish and rest. Bad couldn’t keep doing this. He risked breaking the long-forged restraint on his dark nature. “You should have taken both or at least one and found me to inform me about the Egg. I could have helped.”

“Like I said, you told us you hated us. Why would we have gone to you for help?”

“Because I would have,” Dream said, and the air shifted. The shadows bayed and roared and tried to overtake Bad’s senses. The anger pouring off George had nothing on the abyss leaking out of Dream. “But just like before, all it took for you to leave me was an excuse.”

“You told us you hated us!” George repeated strained.

“And you believed it!” Dream snapped. The last of George’s anger fizzled out, and Dream’s trembling returned to his arms and fists which he hid back under the table. Bad wasted no time putting his hand back over the nearest fist. The fist surprisingly opened and grabbed

hold of Bad's open hand, fingers slipping into his tightly. Bad kept the surprise out of his face and posture. He couldn't give Dream a reason to let go. "Just like you did before."

George's anger renewed. "If you knew we were going to believe you if you told us you hated us, then why would you do it again?"

"Because last time it wasn't me who told you," Dream said darkly. "It was Tommy."

"Tommy?" George said incredulously.

"Me?!" Tommy exclaimed, floating down to get in between the two. His shocked face pointed at Dream. "Are you f\*\*\*\*\* serious? He believed me?!"

Dream's mask nodded, and the fingers squeezed so tight that softer hands would have cracked. Bad bit his tongue to hold back his instinctive "language" knowing it wouldn't help the situation, but then shadows slipped out his core surged and bayed through his limbs. They roared for vengeance for one of Bad's legion. Demons who were legion did not fail to defend their fellow legionnaires. Bad wrestled his shadows back into place. His overworld legion was not like his last. Violence would not help Dream.

Tommy whistled and flipped to look upside down at George. "You really messed up."

"I didn't do anything," defended George. "I believed my best friend when he said that he hated me."

"Yeah, nah, you're not getting it," Techno said. He put his elbow on the table and leaned his head into it. "Dream gave you a chance to prove that you weren't going to do it again."

"What are you talking about?" George said. Bad nearly opened his mouth to explain (and maybe keep Tommy from cursing again—the shadows were getting too riled), but he snapped his mouth shut. His input wasn't going to help. Techno huffed and snorted, and Dream's shoulders briefly slumped.

“You never came to find me and ask why. Even now, you are only asking because I came to you,” Dream said quietly. Bad gave his hand a squeeze at Dream’s shuddering breath.

“Sapnap knew where to find me. And he came. He didn’t ask. But he came. Just like before, he came with his own thoughts and ideas. He chose what to believe without—without asking. You never came. Just like you didn’t come with the others to take me down. Just like you never visited me in Pandora.” Again Dream’s hand squeezed Bad’s back hard enough to break more pliable fingers.

“You left me to rot even after all I did for you. Even after I pushed Tubbo to exile Tommy for your sake. After I defended you whenever I could. And why? Because I couldn’t leave you as king of the Greater SMP? Because I didn’t give in to your every demand? Because I was too much trouble to deal with? Why? Why did you—?” Dream cut himself and gripped his free hand into a fist. His grip on Bad’s hand hurt. “It was easier to hate you.”

Bad watched silently as George’s expression widened into shock, and the young moderator started to shake his head. Words formed in his mouth, but none of them came out. Biting his own lips, Bad held his own words of comfort back. Finally George’s lips stilled and pressed together.

“Fine,” he spit out. “Let’s get this over with.”

The moderator threw out a hand, and blue light surrounded Dream. Every number of his code blazed the same blue, and Bad slipped. The shadows overtook his vision, and he lunged at George. The shadows did not account for the table, so the large body folded over the table as the invasive moderator clambered backwards. A large form, smaller than their body but heavier and bulkier, pinned their reach to the table. Their physical reach only.

The amalgamation of code creaked under their dark hold. Part of them—him—remembered someone with this mess of compartmentalization code. Someone that had been legion once too. But not anymore. Not when that one had betrayed one of them. The amalgamate code would swirl and tear under their power. He would *suffer*.

“Bad, stop!”

The call had the shadows confused long enough for Bad to wrangle them back into his core. Back to himself. He heaved heavy breaths, taking stock of his situation. Techno had him pinned to the table, and his stretching claws had shadows fading from his fingers. George had horror twisted around his glasses. Guilt and shame silenced the shadows, and Bad curled his limbs into his center. Snorting out a small huff, Techno adjusted to Bad's smaller form and moved off him. Bad slowly and carefully took his place back beside Dream. Dream grabbed Bad's hand instantly, and some of the shame lifted.

George pushed himself from where he was cowering on the far wall and marched over to the front door flinging it open. The movement startled Bad even though it shouldn't have. George had always shown himself to move quickly when motivated. Dream's grip relaxed, and he let go of Bad's hand. Bad bent his tail as much as he could to curl around Dream's ankle before letting it fall slack and drag behind him as he stood.

Dream's hand grabbed back his hand.

"You did not hurt anyone," Dream murmured.

"But I could have," Bad grumbled. "I could have hurt George. He's never going to—" He swallowed. He'd caused enough trouble.

"He is not worth being sad over," Dream whispered. Before the boy could pull away, Bad covered Dream's hand with his free one.

"All of you are worth being sad over," he whispered with a small smile. A small tremor vibrated through Dream's hand.

"Sad enough to—" Dream started before swallowing his words. But Bad knew. He immediately tucked the boy into his side.

"I can't help them," Bad said, placing his head on Dream's. "They won't let me. And even if I could, that doesn't mean I'd leave you, you muffinhead."

“It’s happened before,” Dream whispered, and Bad’s insides burned. He’d known. With the Egg—everything that happened with Dream in that other time. It happened without him helping Dream. Or Sappy. Or George...Like things here had. Even now, was he helping?

The shadows surged.

No. He couldn’t think like that. He had to do what he could. Which, at the moment, was to tell the truth.

“Well, it’s not happening now,” Bad said firmly. He let the boy go to stare into Dream’s soulless mask. Because behind it he knew there were uncertain green eyes. “You can’t get rid of me no matter how hard you try. And even if you did get rid of me somehow, I doubt Techno or Niki would let you get too far. And Ranboo and Ender can teleport so actually nowhere’s too far. I mean, I guess you can teleport too, but you’ve shown Techno how to do it, so that won’t work. And Tommy’s probably wouldn’t have any trouble finding and getting to you no matter where you go even without teleportation—”

“Okay, Bad, I get it,” Dream said a bit gruffly as he shook off Bad’s hold. If Bad knew his muffinhead well, Dream was likely trying not to cry. “Never getting rid of you guys. Got it. Let’s go make sure George doesn’t fall asleep waiting for us.”

Techno snorted. Bad gave his own quiet, pointed snort. Blood red eyes shot to him surprised.

“Seriously? Could you guys stop with that? Not all of us can understand pig,” Tommy protested. “By the way, I think Gogy’s a bit confused.”

“What’s wrong with Sleepy now?” grumbled Techno.

“You’d be f\*\*\*\* confused too if no one was outside where they’re supposed to be,” said Tommy.

“Language!” Bad finally exclaimed. The shadows calmed, and Bad’s head was clear as he rushed after Dream and out the door.

He vaguely heard Techno ask from behind them, “Where did Tubbo and the pirate captain go?”

Tommy said something that would require another call of “language,” so Bad ignored it. Dream stood right outside the door, and in front of him George scowled with his arms crossed.

“So what was all that showing the server you weren’t infected by the Egg? Was that all a lie to make a fool out of me?” George said in a growl. “An excuse to threaten me with *Bad*?”

“No. It wasn’t—Tubbo and Puffy should be right here,” Dream said, stumbling over his words slightly. Most wouldn’t have noticed his slip in composure. George would. And so Dream’s voice hardened. “You *exposed* my code without warning. Did you expect Bad not to react?”

“Not like that,” George snapped back.

“He’s a demon. He’s always made that clear,” Dream said. “We did come here to have you scan my code and prove to the others I am Egg-free.”

“Fine. Let’s prove it,” George said. “XD!”

Bad blinked, the name sounding slightly familiar when a burst of light nearly blinded him. He instinctively scrambled backwards into the mushroom house. He knew that light. No. Wait. He didn’t. Did he?

“Hello, Admin,” a hovering giant figure loomed over George’s head. Bad ducked back into the house, not wanting to be seen by the giant with wings. A celestial. It was a celestial.



Where did it come from? And why did it feel familiar? And why did it remind him of Dream?

Techno bumped Bad's shoulder. He snorted, and Bad tried to smile but instead grimaced. Demons and celestials normally did not get along, but everything about this masked celestial made Bad's code crawl. Wait. Masked? Not a smiley mask. Or not with a beady-eyed smile. An open-mouthed smile. An obvious mockery of Dream's. Bad shivered.

A hand landed on his shoulder, and Bad jumped. He looked down at the keratin-covered, black fingers. Techno snuffled and gave a brief squeal. Bad gave a short grunt, earning an eye roll.

"XD?" Dream finally said. "You're here?"

"Yes," the celestial in the air said in that echoey and entirely too loud voice. "I have come to help my friend."

"Your friend?" asked Dream.

"Me," George said blatantly.

"You know that guy?" Techno said, moving to stand behind Dream who was starting to falter again. Apparently Dream had burned through everything Bad had given him already. "He broke the Syndicate's table once. You didn't have anything to do with that, did you?"

"Why would I?" asked George.

"Wasn't talking to you," Techno grunted.

"No. I had nothing to do with that—Wait. You've met XD?" Dream said, straightening again.

“Yeah. Like I said, he broke our table. But then he put it back together, so it wasn’t that big a thing.”

“They were activating an End Portal. I made sure they couldn’t,” the floating celestial said as his halos spun. Small wings on either side of its mask-like face flapped a couple of times. Like a happily chirping bird. Bad’s stomach swirled, and the shadows cowered. It was too strong to act like that. “And then I let them use the inactive portal as a table. Minimal player interference.”

“Good job, XD,” Dream said warily. “How do you know George?”

“He’s my friend,” XD chirped. Bile built up Bad’s throat. “I met him in his dreams.”

“Yeah, we’re friends. Would have been great to know he existed so we could have been friends earlier, but it is what it is,” said George with a vicious smirk. “Hey, XD, would you do me a favor?”

“Anything for my best friend,” said the floating celestial, hovering close to George. If Bad was a braver demon, he would have dashed and pulled George away from the—the thing. As it was, he gave a near silent sniffing grunt. His accent was atrocious, but it caught Techno’s attention. Blood red eyes slid to him, and he vaguely pictured how he must have looked, cowering in the door frame. He straightened his back and stretched up to his full height. He then whispered in snorts and badly pitched squeals.

Techno snuffled and snorted, and he moved closer to Dream. Bad tried to convince himself that the reason he didn’t move closer was that it might set off George or the...celestial. Yep. That was the only reason. He shuddered and crouched back into the doorway.

Tubbo appeared in front of George, and Bad realized he had missed part of the conversation. A celestial could use admin abilities, especially if it had a tie to the server’s Admin, but this one was wrong. It wasn’t a natural celestial. This server had a guardian, a dragon. So what was this celestial? What tie did it have to Dream?

“How did I get back here?” Tubbo asked.

“I did that!” XD boomed. “George had a question for you.”

“George?” asked Tubbo, staring at the young moderator. “Oh. Did you find out if Dream is infected by the Egg?”

“He isn’t,” George said flatly. “He said you wanted me to check his code for infection.”

“We did,” Tubbo said nodding. “So they’re not Egg-fected?”

“No. They’re not ‘Egg-fected,’” George said. His lensed gaze glinted towards Dream. Bad wondered what was going on George’s head, but he had never been good at reading this particular muffinhead. “Not that you seemed too worried since you disappeared.”

“Well, it was more Puffy’s idea,” Tubbo said uncomfortably. “Ghostbur came back.”

“Wilbur?!” Tommy burst as he swooped in front of Tubbo. Wide brown eyes stared into narrow blue ones. “What does that b\*\*\*\*\* want?”

Bad swallowed the “language” in his mouth, the shadows too cowed to do much, and leaned out to keep a better eye on Tommy. A sudden shining figure stopped him. Hovering over him, XD grinned.

“Badboyhalo,” the celestial boomed. “Long time no see.”

Gulping, Bad struggled to place the familiarity from earlier but ended up with shivers unwittingly wracking his form instead. He cleared his throat.

“Hello,” he croaked. “I—I’m sorry. But I don’t—can’t seem to remember—”

“You have not had any nightmares. Or not since I have reformed myself. That took a long time. Longer than it should have. You are free from the Egg.”

“I—I am,” Bad garbled. He cleared his throat again, but his voice didn’t steady. “You—you said we’ve met?”

The looming celestial leaned closer and tilted his head.

“I guess not this time. How strange. We were once quite close. Until you ruined everything. Or perhaps it wasn’t you. My own memories are a bit jumbled between what happened before and what did not happen now. You have still made strides to destroy my Admin’s server in this time, yes?”

“I—I didn’t—It wasn’t on purpose. The Egg—”

“You were always easily corrupted,” the celestial said. A hand landed on Bad’s head, around a horn. The hand squeezed. “It will be fun to get to know each other again.”

Bad’s lungs wheezed short, quick breaths, and Bad struggled to even and deepen them. The hand was suddenly yanked away, pulling his horn painfully before letting go. The top of Dream’s green cloak appeared in the bottom of Bad’s vision, and Bad dropped his gaze to stare at it. Dream stood between him and the celestial.

“Leave him alone, XD,” Dream said lowly. XD didn’t move.

“I was only reacquainting myself with an old friend,” XD boomed. “Was there not something more important for you to be attending? A ghost of an old enemy gone wild?”

“Yes. Which is why you shouldn’t be distracting me,” Dream said. “Didn’t you go into stasis when the server was deeply infected?”

“I did. It took a long time to reform, like I was telling my old acquaintance,” XD said eagerly. Bad kept himself from shrinking to fit behind Dream. He had acted cowardly enough. “But now that I am reformed, Mother has started to insist I rejoin with you. But I do not feel inclined too. If the Enderman gets to stay in his form, I do not see why I should leave mine. I like being my own entity. I can do what I like.”

“Hate to break whatever pow-wow is going on over there, but we should find the pirate captain as soon as possible. Before Wilbur makes the situation worse,” said Techno. He had edged around XD to wedge himself somewhat in between Dream and the celestial. And Dream had let him.

“I agree. You should go deal with your Players as that is your job. I will return to doing mine,” said XD. “Unless you need another favor, friend.”

“I’m good,” George said. Black lenses pointed straight at Bad, and the urge to shrink grew for a reason other than fear. What an image he must make, a 9-foot demon hiding behind a much shorter Admin. “Thanks for your help, XD.”

“Anytime, friend!” XD boomed happily. And then the celestial was gone.

“Are you alright?” asked Dream, the side of his masked face angled towards Bad. The demon saw a glimpse of concerned green eyes.

“I’m fine,” Bad said, straightening himself again. They had bigger problems than whatever his body remembered that his head had forgotten. “Demons and celestial beings don’t get along is all.”

“Sounded like it was a lot more personal than that,” George commented.

“All the more reason to mind our own business then,” Techno said, blocking Bad’s view of George. And George’s view of Bad. “Where did you say Wilbur took you and Puffy?”

Tubbo perked up his ears on being addressed. He pointed in a direction eastward and away from the mushroom house.

“He grabbed me and pulled me that way. He kept babbling about his Friend. Puffy insisted we go where he let him lead us to wherever he wanted us to go to figure out what had him all worked up. I told her that was a f\*\*\*\*\* dumb idea, but she dragged me along anyway,” said Tubbo. “I don’t think she completely believes you on the whole Wilbur thing.”

“Then she’s being a f\*\*\*\*\* moron,” Tommy said.

“Language!” Bad finally burst. He instantly felt relief. Honestly, didn’t they know how hard it was to keep himself in check with all the profanity being thrown about? A demon had very short limits. The two boys groaned in unison.

“Come on,” Dream said before either could complain. “We better find Puffy before—” He hesitated. “I have a better idea.”

“If this idea doesn’t involve me, I think I’m going to get back to my nap,” said George. Irritation welled in Bad, and the shadows swirled again. What was George thinking? Was he really going to go back to his house and ignore everything—everyone again? Did he care that little for his friendships? He could still make up with Dream. The two—they’d always been uncommonly close. Surely if George put in more effort, no *some* effort, into repairing their relationship, they could go back to the way it was? And then Sapnap could—

Bad’s soul sank into his own shadows, and they whimpered. No. They couldn’t. They would never again be a set of three. Not even if Sapnap put in his best effort. Not even if George actually tried. The trust was gone. The innocence of their friendship was dead.

Even Bad and Dream’s relationship was no longer the same. Bad could never go back to being one of Dream’s hunters and his best friend’s dad. He and Dream would have to forge a new status quo. And he would. He was. But...Sapnap.

His head and heart spun in circles. Bad couldn't leave Dream, but he also couldn't choose one of his boys over the other. He would have to figure out a way to help both. He couldn't give up on either. Not like George apparently could.

...He hated how his heart viewed the young moderator as his too.

"You should come," Bad said as loudly as he dared. He caught the goggled gaze. "Sappy misses you."

George stopped his stride. "Where is Sapnap anyway? If you brought people from Kinoko to get the okay from me, I would think Sapnap would insist on being part of the group."

"He's back near their base," Tubbo said. "He's...sleeping."

"Sleeping?" George asked with a raised eyebrow. "Is he trying to steal my thing?"

"He's in a coma. I promised to bring him out after you declared us clear of the Egg's code," Dream said. "So he should wake up when we return."

"What do you mean you're going to bring him out of a coma?" George said, voice hard again. "That sounds like you put him in it."

"Why don't you ask him?" Dream challenged.

"I think I will," George said. He crossed his arms again. "So what is this great plan of yours to deal with Ghostbur?"

Dream stuck his hand into the world's code, and the numbers around them glowed into view without Bad pushing energy into his eyes to see them.

“Let’s catch him in the act.”

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George almost didn’t believe what he was seeing. Dream was using his full Admin abilities. Or as full as he could while still missing a chunk of his own code. He wasn’t a fool. He knew what XD was. Dream pushing away a part of himself he never wanted. George knew that because he knew Dream. Or he had known Dream. This person using his most powerful abilities openly and without regret in front of George, him George didn’t know. And he doubted he ever would.

Not that he wanted to.

“Here,” said Dream, handing George an invis pot. He then gave George two more. “The best way to know what Wilbur is up to is to spy on him.”

“Like during the L’Manberg election,” George said, watching this strange Dream carefully. This weird Dream shrugged and nodded. He also handed the last potions to Tubbo. Everyone else had several. Many more than they might even need. All pulled from Dream’s world’s code.

“Not gonna lie. This feels a little weird,” Tubbo said, storing all the potions but one in his inventory.

“Why? 'Cause we’re going to spy on your people instead of mine?” Tommy said with a scowl. George watched fascinated as Tubbo flushed and avoided eye contact with Tommy and the rest. The less troublesome half of the chaotic duo fiddled with the invis pot’s stopper before yanking his head in Tommy’s general direction.

“It’s more weird that I’m being handed invis pots that appeared from f\*\*\*\*\* nowhere.”



“That is f\*\*\*\*\* weird,” Tommy admitted. “But you get used to it.”

“Used to it?” Tubbo said in a squeakier voice. A small reminder that these two hadn’t fully exited puberty yet. Didn’t stop the two from causing all sorts of chaos on the server though. Like burning down George’s house.

“Yeah. How’d you think we got all those creepers and stuff to attack your group?” Tommy said, doing that strange “laying in air” motion. George might be a bit more jealous of that than he’d admit. Imagine being able to lie down comfortably anywhere he went. Not that he wanted to die or be torn in pieces down to his code. And there was no guarantee it would work on his code anyway.

“I thought the Blade did that. He’s always scarily overprepared,” Tubbo answered. “Didn’t he at one point have a cave full of wither skulls?”

“If you’re going to talk about me while I’m still here, could you do it quieter,” the Blade butt in. He was hiding a small smile, so he wasn’t really upset by the situation. So why did he feel the need to interrupt the conversation? Unless he was as attention-hungry as Sapnap had suggested he was.

“We could, but we won’t,” Tommy snipped back with an open grin of his own. “Everyone knows you’re one overly paranoid f\*\*\*\*\*.”

“Language!” called Bad from where he had placed himself near Dream. George focused on Bad’s code, but it still had none of the sickly wither-skull grey code of the Egg. Didn’t stop the demon from being the cause of the Egg’s increase in power. And the way he had lunged mindlessly at George earlier had confirmed some things he’d long suspected about Bad’s nature. The demon took a long, heavy breath and continued in a well-feigned normal tone, “We should get going before Puffy finds herself in a dangerous situation. How many lives does she have again?”

“One, I think,” Tubbo said with a thoughtful look on his face. “She lost her second during our failed resc—um...attack?”

“We should get going then,” Tommy said as he tilted himself upright. “Wilbur’s capable of anything.”

“You think he’d hurt Puffy?” Tubbo asked.

“If that would help whatever stupid idea he’s got in his head, yes,” Tommy said flatly. “Dream?”

“Let me get the command ready,” Dream said, reaching into the world’s code. A larger hand stopped his.

“No offense, but you’ve done enough. Some of us would like to get a turn doing something,” the Blade said. He gave an annoying snort, and Dream pulled his hand out and sagged. George blinked. He shook his head briefly. But no, the infamous Blade had his hand up to his wrist in Dream’s world’s code. How? Why? Why was *Dream’s rival* able to access *Dream’s world’s* code? Sure, he was an Admin or whatever now, but just being an Admin didn’t give one full access to another Admin’s world code. The Blade looked down at Dream as he almost leaned onto the large piglin hybrid’s form. “Not that I would make any mistakes, but want to check my work anyway? Might feed your need to do everything.”

“I don’t need to do everything,” Dream grumbled and did lean over the large pig’s arm to examine the commands *the Blade* created in *Dream’s* world’s code. “Huh. You managed to remember to lock onto a personal code’s location rather than a specific set of coordinates.”

“Figured that out after borrowing Niki’s compass while you were sleeping. Figured it’d be a similar concept.”

“It is,” Dream said. Chatting about code in a way George had only see him do with Callahan. He’d tried to do it with George, but George’s code required different parameters. “Not bad. But unless you change this part of the command, you’ll only transport 4 of us.”

“Really? Any random four?”

“No,” Dream muttered, and George knew he was squinting behind his mask like he would whenever some line of code intrigued him. “It would take everyone but me and Bad. It even takes Tommy’s ghost properties into accou—” He threw himself into the coding window but was pushed back by the large arm.

“Thanks. That’s all I needed to know,” the Blade said as he basically threw Dream into Bad. “Catch.”

George had enough time to see Bad catch Dream before he found himself in a completely different biome from his dark forest. Ghostbur knelt next to a bloody and broken body. Curly hair fanned beneath the bleeding head. Dark black stained plain brown and white.

“What the f\*\*\*\* did you do?!” Tommy shouted, rushing past, no, through Ghostbur and to Puffy.

“She fell. She fell from up there,” the ghost said in a shaking voice. Tears ran down from his eyes in streams. He pointed to the top of the ravine they were standing at the bottom of. “I couldn’t catch her—”

“Cut the act, Wilbur. No one’s buying your f\*\*\*\* b\*\*\*\*\*! What did you do to her?!”

“T—Tommy? I didn’t—” Ghostbur stuttered. He grabbed his head and hovered off the ground and away from the body, letting them get a better view of it. George’s stomach turned. He hated death. Real death. This looked like—

“Calm down,” the Blade boomed. “She’s still alive.”

“What? How?” Tubbo asked as the Blade hurried towards the body.

“Did you get a death message?”

“No, but—”

“She’s breathing,” the Blade confirmed as he leaned over the woman. He pulled a potion from his inventory and splashed it onto the body. The body shivered. Wait. She really was still alive.

“How is she alive?” Tommy demanded, hovering over the woman’s form. She coughed.

“Because I’m tough to kill,” the woman wheezed. She shakily sat up. “Thank—” A cough gurgled up her throat, but she continued, “Thank you for your help, Techno.”

“You’re okay!” Ghostbur said, surging forward. “I thought you died!”

“I thought you might have thought that,” Puffy said. “Funny how you seemed a lot less panicked as you let me bleed out.”

“I’m sorry,” Ghostbur blubbered. “I didn’t know what to do! You were just laying there. Like Friend. Like all of my Friends. They never moved again once they stopped. I—I didn’t want to lose another friend.”

“So Puffy just happened to fall while helping you look for your new lost Friend?” Tubbo said.

“I thought I saw Friend in the ravine, and Puffy helped me. But then she fell.”

“Funny. I don’t remember losing my balance. But I do remember being pushed,” Puffy said almost lightly. She was fuming. “So Tommy was right. You were lying.”

“Lying? I’m not—I’m not lying! I thought Friend was down here! And I don’t know where he is. He’s my Friend. Like all the others. If—if you don’t want me to find him after falling, that’s okay. It probably hurt to fall. I’ll find him on my own.”

“No you f\*\*\*\*\* won’t,” Tommy said, lunging at Wilbur and passing right through him like he did everyone else. His face flushed, and he turned a glare at The Blade. “Well, stop him!”

“Didn’t want to get in your way,” the Blade snickered. Wilbur ran in the opposite direction before hitting an invisible wall. “Sorry, Wilbur. Can’t go that way. It’s blocked for some reason.”

“Ooo, nice. I don’t think I’ve seen Dream put up barrier blocks that fast. And from far away. How’d you do that?” Tommy asked.

“I’d explain it, but I have a feeling most of it would go over your head, and I don’t feel like wasting more of my time today.”

“Are you calling me dumb?!” Tommy growled at the Blade, fearless as ever. George tilted his head and narrowed his eyes to see—there. There were several barrier blocks around Wilbur. He could only turn back and towards them. George hadn’t caught the Blade modifying the world’s code, but he must have.

“I dunno. Am I?” the Blade smirked.

“Just go with ‘no,’ Tom. It’s the safest answer,” Tubbo suggested.

“F\*\*\*\*\* the safest answer. I’m not f\*\*\*\*\* dumb!” Tommy said. Wilbur sped past the shouting Tommy and the rest of them only to slam into another invisible wall.

“As fun as it would be to sit here and discuss how stupid you are, I’d like to wrap this up and get back to Dream and Halo. Your cursing is giving me a Chat-related headache,” the Blade said. “Wilbur, you going to ‘fess up or are you going to make us drag you all the way back to Kinoko. I don’t think it’s far.”

“It’s not,” Puffy said. She reached out and grabbed Wilbur. “I think we should go to Kinoko.”

“Okay,” Wilbur said, sounding pathetic. “But there’s no one there but the cat man.”

“Ant’s still there?” Puffy asked, a bit shocked. “Is he there all by himself?”

“What? You’re not worried about him being infected by the—the thing?” asked Tommy.

“If you aren’t, then he’s not,” Puffy said. “They’re not. Are they?”

Oh, she was talking to him. Startled George mumbled out, “No. They’re not.”

“Nothing to worry about there, then,” Puffy continued talking to Tommy. “But I am worried about his mental state since he hasn’t come looking for the rest of us.”

“Yeah. Because you lot have been so welcoming to him,” Tommy scoffed.

“Ant’s a good guy, but we were being cautious,” said Tubbo. “We didn’t want—”

“We get it! No one wanted a repeat of the—the nightmare! But that didn’t give you the right to do s\*\*\*\*\* to Ant! Didn’t mean you could f\*\*\*\*\* come and attack us! We were doing fine without you!”

Tubbo flinched, and George saw one hand clench onto the side of the boy’s shirt, untucking it. Then, the former president stepped forward, face twisting around his scar.

“Enough!” said a voice from behind George. One George was all too used to coming from behind him and scaring years off his lives. But never with this kind of serious anger. And not

with George's reaction being resignation and regret instead of fear. It was followed by another familiar, exhausted voice.

"Sorry, Techno. I tried to stop him," Bad said. George peeked over his shoulder to see his two former best friends standing next to each other. Bad was holding Dream up by both of the idiot's elbows, supporting the leaning Admin with his whole body. Dream stared straight ahead with his mask as if he didn't need the demon's help to stand.

"Wilbur, what do you want?"

"You gone," the ghost said, no longer hunched over and curled into himself. "You to pay for all you've done to me and my family."

"And what family would that be?" Dream said confidently. As if he already knew. Maybe he did. But George knew a Dream that would have acted confident to get information.

"L'Manberg. Pogtopia. My f\*\*\*\*\* father!" said Wilbur. His volume rose with every word, and his face grew dark with bluish splotches and his body shook. "You stole Tommy and Techno from me! And now you've made your own little family with them and Niki and your own father figure. How is that fair? How is it fair that you get to go off scott-free after all the pain you've cause me? All the pain you've brought on everyone in this server? You get to section off your own little slice of paradise and what? Dad has to accept a half life in Mumza's realm? And why! Because you killed him!"

"I had to. He was infected," Dream protested.

"And yet Tommy's still here," said Wilbur. "How is *Tommy* still here?"

"You have a problem with that, you f\*\*\*\*\*," shouted Tommy.

"Toms, don't you understand? If you can be here, then why isn't Dad?"

“Because to get Phil back, his body would have to be brought back to life,” George said, inserting himself into the conversation. Better to speed this conversation along and finish it so he could go back home. “Tommy’s one thing. He’s not really alive. From what I’ve seen, Dream pieced his personal code together, but his body is dead. So basically he’s only a soul. Almost like you, but his ‘ghost’ code’s more fragmented and supplemented with foreign code to keep it working.”

“Foreign code?” Tommy asked. George shrugged. He had a guess as to where the foreign code came from, but he had no proof. Dream had changed, and he could have gotten the code from anywhere. The whole server was his. But XD existed, and Dream had poured so much of himself into his server. *Had* . He had also stood by as the Egg infected the entire thing.

“So what you’re saying is that he could do the same for Phil?” Wilbur asked.

“He could if Phil’s personal code was still on the server,” Bad said. His hold on Dream shifted, subtly moving to hold onto the idiot Admin more securely. “But it’s not. I think his wife took it?”

The demon had turned to the Blade who tilted his head. “Eh. That’s what likely happened. But we got that information from a certain ghost who turned out to have his own afterlife agenda.”

“Everything I said about Phil was true,” Wilbur said, sounding offended. “Mumza made me promise to deliver Phil’s message word for word.”

“Sure. And then she made you promise to be a complete a\*\*\*\*\* and make everyone think we’re still with the Egg,” Tommy hissed. “As if we’re going to believe anything you say anymore.”

“You don’t have to. I delivered the message. Whatever I did afterwards was my business.”



“Considering all you’ve done, I think it is now our business,” said Puffy. She turned to the Blade. “Is there any way to transfer him safely and quickly to Kinoko or Ponk’s infirmary outside your base?”

“Sure. Give me a minute,” the Blade said, as he reached into Dream’s world’s code. Both the Blade and Wilbur disappeared.

“Um...where did they go?” asked Tubbo.

“Don’t worry. Techno will explain when he gets back,” Bad answered. “Also, Tommy. Language!”

“Seriously?” Tommy complained. “Of all the things right now—”

“Duckling!” Puffy cried, rushing through Tommy and towards Dream. A thin but deceptively strong tail stopped her progress forward. “Bad, please. He looks like he needs help.”

“I’m fine,” Dream said so calmly, he would have likely fooled everyone here except Bad and George himself. But the skin of his neck and forearms was as white as his mask, and then there was the fact his legs had collapsed beneath him.

“No, you’re not. I’m not a medical doctor like Ponk, but I could help,” Puffy offered. Which wasn’t a bad idea. Some medical care was better than none in this situation. Bad would be a good choice to look Dream over, but he was currently busy with holding the idiot Admin upright.

“No thanks,” Dream said, refusing help. George frowned. Dream refusing help. As always.

“But Duckling—”

“He said ‘no,’” Bad said darkly. Darker than most thought the kind demon could get. It had been a while since George had seen Bad get seriously harsh with anyone. White eyes had darkened to an ominous steely grey. A darker grey that was nothing like the Egg and yet terrifying all the same. “So step back and respect his personal space unless you’d like a firsthand demonstration of what demon tails can really do.”

Puffy took a step back but didn’t move away any further.

“Bad, you know I don’t want to hurt him. It has to be hard to look him over from your position.”

It was. Bad remained behind Dream, holding the Admin up as best he could. The closer George looked, the easier it was to see that Dream’s entire body was trembling or all-out shaking. If he were anyone but Dream, the man in Bad’s hold would have fainted. But, no. Dream was too good to do that. To admit he needed help.

“I’m back.” The call broke through George’s observations, leaving him to focus on the Blade’s reappearance. “Anything happen while I was gone?”

“Dream’s about to f—flipping pass out,” Tommy said.

“Flipping?” Tubbo repeated. The boy ghost glared at him, but George caught the grateful glance from the Blade.

“Techno!” Puffy said in relief. “Would you tell your demon to let me examine Dream? He looks about to pass out.”

“Why would I do that?” the Blade snorted. “Isn’t immediate family in charge of those decisions?”

“He’s my duckling,” Puffy insisted.

“No I’m not,” Dream said, slurring slightly. “You disowned me.”

“Disowned you? I never—”

“You didn’t,” George interrupted. He glowered at the Admin who had whitened another shade. Why was Dream always so stubborn? “But you might as well have.”

“What?” Puffy asked, rightfully confused. Her black sunglasses angled at George. “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing,” Dream cut in. His words remained slurry. “What’s important now is getting the confirmation that we are not infected back to the rest of your group before Wilbur finds a way to twist his capture to his advantage.”

“Maybe we should take a break first?” Puffy suggested. George scoffed audibly. Dream slow down? That would be the day.

“We should be fine,” the Blade added. “Wilbur’s in a nice box of soundproof blocks. He won’t be convincing anyone of anything anytime soon.”

“I’ll rest when we get back. Take a nice nap. But we have to return now,” Dream insisted.

“The nap won’t be too long?” Bad asked. His tail had embraced the front of Dream’s legs. Helping in holding the Admin up was George’s guess.

“I am sure Tommy won’t let it go on for too long.”

“D\*\*\*\* straight,” Tommy immediately said.

“Language,” Bad said in a wilting, resigned tone.

“My monetization, Tommy,” the Blade grumbled.

“I want you both to know you—”

“Dream!” Bad cried, and whatever Tommy was going to say was forgotten as Dream slumped completely into Bad’s hold. Bad automatically adjusted him to hold Dream upright and against his chest. Puffy tried to near them again, but Bad growled and his eyes flashed back to that warning dark grey.

“If you don’t want to lose a limb, I’d take a step back,” the Blade said from directly behind Puffy. How the Blade had moved that fast, George wasn’t sure. But he wasn’t surprised the famed Blood Warrior could move that quickly. The large piglin pulled Puffy backwards and away from the growling Bad. “There’s a reason I didn’t want to tangle with a demon when I first came to this server.”

“But it’s just Bad,” Tubbo said. Not that the kid moved closer, George noted.

“That’s how he gets you,” George said with an eye roll. “He makes you lower your guard with the thought of ‘it’s just Bad,’ and then when you least expect it, he proves that he is a demon after all.”

The dark grey eyes had faded back to white, and they pinched tight in pain after George’s words. Served Bad right. He was a sneaky f\*\*\*\*\*, and if it wasn’t for him, the Egg wouldn’t have messed with Dream’s mind and turned him against them. (It wasn’t the Egg, but George was not ready to admit that yet.)

“All right. Time to send you all back to where you belong. Which for two of you would be invisible boxes like Wilbur’s if certain voice’s had their way. But no worries, I won’t give into peer pressure today. In exchange, you make sure to tell the rest of the buffoons in your group that we aren’t omelet-approved,” the Blade said. The piglin’s hand was back in the

code, and George had enough time to scowl before appearing in the snow beside an oddly-shaped mountain.

Blinking, he got a better look and saw the barrier-blocked base carved into the mountain's side. Fertile fields stretched in the hundreds of blocks area, and a large mansion stood nearest the mountain.

"George?" came a call behind him. George turned to see Fundy standing outside a building that looked very shoddy compared to the one inside the barrier blocks. "What are you doing here? Did you come to check up on Sapnap?"

"Among other things," George said, because if he was already here, then why not check up on Sapnap? He should probably also tell him about Dream's apparent time travel escapade that Dream could have lied about. The Dream George had known wouldn't have. But this Dream...the Dream that had stood by Schlatt's side. That had disappeared and left the server to viral corruption. That chose dangerous allies like the Blade over his own best friends. *That* Dream could have lied.

And of course there was always the possibility that the Egg somehow showed him an illusion of a future that never happened to get him temporarily out of the way. From what Dream said, Karl is the only one who could confirm the story, but no one had seen him since the Egg's defeat.

Maybe it was time to have someone find him. Someone with extreme cheat powers on the server. Powers that normally remained with the server's Admin. Maybe he should call his "friend" one more time.

## Chapter End Notes

Come to the dadboyhalo side. We have a big, scary demon who doesn't swear.

# For You, The World

## Chapter Summary

XD helps George, as good friends do. But XD wonders if helping friends should carry so great a toll.

Inside the bubble, Dream wakes back up with a little bit of help.

## Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little late, which is completely my fault. Should have timed it better. I wanted it out by yesterday, but still...

In honor of the birth of the Technoblade. May he continue to never die in our memory and hearts.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

XD did not care much for mortals. He had existed long before all of them and would exist long after them. He would occasionally choose one world or another to influence, and then when he got bored he would move on. Or that was how his existence should be.

He should oversee his Admin and all the Players in his chosen world from afar. His main job should be to keep people out of the End and away from the world's Mother, the first guardian of every world. His existence should over time become one that the Players would worship as a god and beg favors from. He should remain until he grew tired of those Players and that world. Then he should return the borrowed code of the world's Admin, severing his connection to the world, and leave the remaining Players to fend for themselves.

Still, for reasons he had parsed down to his current Admin-donated code, XD did not like being alone and afar in this world. The Mother and her Endermen were not fantastic company. Endermen rarely thought of anything but fixing and terraforming every corner of their world and protecting Mother. Mother's thoughts remained on her Endermen, her Admin, and keeping their world in balance. Worlds without Enderdragons collapsed due to a lack of balance in one way or another. XD had watched as many of his former worlds collapsed due to that lack.

As he did with most Admin donors, XD had decided since entering the world to imitate its Admin's appearance. He found that appearance useful as he slipped into a Player's dream out of curiosity and an unusual need for personal interaction. And then, what should be changed as XD found a best friend.

XD had not understood the mortals' or even Mother's fascination with *others* . Other beings had their purposes, but they had never been worth fussing over. Not until George.

"You need me again, Friend George?" XD asked floating in circles around his best friend.

"Yes," George said in that fun, short way of his. XD had to work hard to impress George. It was half the fun of having a friend. George had said so. "Can you help me find a Player?"

"Of course!" XD boomed. His wings flapped on either side of his head as he nodded firmly. "Want me to find the demon and smite him?"

"What?!" George burst in a stutter. Smug satisfaction filled XD at the obvious confusion on George's face. He succeeded in getting his friend to emote clearly! "No! Why would I want that?"

"Because you hate him!" XD chirped. "The demon let the Egg in and caused its rule. More than once too!"

"More than once? What are you talking about?"

"The demon let the Egg into the world in the other timeline, as well."

"How do you know about the other timeline?"

“I have part of Admin Dream’s code,” XD explained lightly. George did not need to know that the Admin’s code overrode his often. The Admin was young but very strong. XD had believed only an ancient immortal Admin like the Angel of Death’s code could accomplish such a feat. “When he came back, I did too. Or the part of me that is a part of him did.”

George grew silent, and XD stopped circling around his friend. The celestial tried to decipher the mortal’s expression, and he thought he had it right. His friend was angry—no, frustrated. Irritated? Mortal emotions were hard. Especially George’s.

“So, he really time-traveled?” George finally whispered.

“Yep,” XD boomed. “He’s been back for over a year!”

“Before the Egg.” George’s face squeezed and wrinkled, which meant he was upset. Or angry? Or sad? XD hoped George wasn’t sad.

“I can teleport the demon here and smite him right now!” XD offered cheerily. Before he could slip into the world’s code, George took a tone with him that XD had not heard before.

“I don’t want you to kill Bad!” The mortal’s volume was high, and his words were strained with a subtle shriek. George took a breath and his tone returned to one much more familiar. “I want you to find me Karl.”

“Karl?” XD repeated, puzzling the first tone out. Angry? Yes, angry sounded right. Maybe? XD had heard George angry before, and it did not sound like that. And why would he be angry? Mortals liked to smite their enemies. XD himself would very much like to smite the demon. Demons and celestials were naturally enemies, and this demon caused harm to XD’s world. To George’s world. Best to smite him.

(A time before he had the mortal Admin’s code fizzled through his mind—a time when he might have known the demon before wearing this mortal face and submitting to chaining himself to this world. But the thought vanished before he could parse it out. Too much time was stored in his head. He didn’t want to struggle to search for specifics.)



“Yes, Karl,” George said in that same strained tone though it was quieter. So he was less angry-or-close-to-angry now? George did like XD giving him favors, and unlike other mortals he never hesitated to ask.

“Which one is Karl?” asked XD. Mortals were different from each other, XD knew that. Mother had more than once pointed out that he should know those under his care better. His job would be easier as a result. But he did not want to when the only ones that bothered to stand out were his Admin, George, the demon, and the totem—oh. The totem builder was not here. Not in this time. The Egg had kept new Players from entering the world. Pity.

“He’s...Karl,” George said. The words were lighter and less strained. “He has brown hair, lighter than mine, with blue eyes and a hoodie that is even harder to look at than Dream’s. It’s blue and has a yellow swirl on it.”

XD hummed. If he asked again, George might get mad, but he had to get a better description. Preferably of the mortal’s code. George’s strange eyesight might make the explanation hard. He preemptively altered his code to adjust his vision to George’s. Colors flickered to their unique and fun versions.

“I see,” XD chirped. “And his code?”

“Messy. Messier than mine,” George answered automatically. He was not angry. Maybe because he knew XD needed code description after all. “The numbers like to vanish in lines and reappear in others. Blue and yellow like his sweatshirt. He keeps forgetting—everything. Can you find him?”

“I can do better!” XD said. He put his hand behind his back and dipped into the world’s code. The world recognized him as its celestial caretaker, so he easily pulled the code of the emptiness behind his back and twisted it into teleportation code.

The mortal tagged Karl stood before George.

“Where am I?” the strangely-coded Player asked in a loose, tired(?) tone. “I...am I on a new server?”

“A new server? Why would you be on a new server?” George asked. Or demanded. XD was not sure which.

“Is this—Wait. What server was I supposed to be on again?”

“You’re on the DreamSMP,” George said in a flat tone. He was certainly not pleased. Should XD smite the mortal? Smiting the random mortal would not be as satisfying as smiting the demon but it would still be satisfying.

“DreamSMP....?” the mortal dragged out in...confusion. That expression had to indicate confusion. The confused mortal let his gaze float around while XD observed George for any sign that the other mortal needed smiting. George was frowning and radiating obvious upset. Was that good enough for smiting? “Oh. Isn’t this...supposed to be more red?”

“Not anymore. Dream took care of the Egg,” George said quickly. “He also said that he only did it after the Egg decided to bring him back in time using you.”

“Bring him back...?” the mortal continued to hum in confusion. The blue eyes gained yellow swirls. “Time travel doesn’t work like that. I have to have a reason for traveling, or I won’t be able to. Time won’t allow it. I am an observer. I observe and return and write, and then I forget. No egg, evil, sentient or otherwise, can control Time. Unless Time allows, no one can travel it. Time is merciless.”

“So you didn’t travel with Dream back in time?” George said, overly focused on the Admin. But he always was. XD knew that. He knew that George helped the celestial learn about mortal relationships because XD reminded George of the Admin. XD did not mind. He was coded to be his Admin’s stand-in whenever needed.

“If I did, it was not because an egg told me to,” the swirled-eyed mortal said. An inhuman echo vibrated under the tenor notes of his voice. “Time itself decided to meddle.”

“Time wanted Dream to go back in time?” George asked in annoyed disbelief. XD knew that one. He had seen that one often.

The swirled-eyed mortal nodded. And then he blinked. The yellow swirls disappeared. “Um...this might sound like a dumb question but...who’s Dream?”

“A moron,” George scoffed. XD understood! George was not mad at this mortal. He was mad at the Admin. But XD could not smite his Admin which was unfortunate. That would have been most satisfying. “Where were you before XD summoned you here?”

“In a cave, I think?” the confused mortal said, sticking his hands into his horrid hoodie’s pockets. “Someone—no something? Something put me in there. I don’t think it was happy with me.”

“Why didn’t you dig yourself out?”

“I didn’t have a pick or wood,” said the confused mortal with a shrug. His hands remained in their pockets. Strange. He kicked a small rock in George’s direction but not hard enough for an attack. “So I guess I should thank you for rescuing me...um...not Dream?”

“You’ve forgotten everything, haven’t you?” George said. The strain was gone and replaced with a deep sigh. He was tired. “George. My name is George. Please tell me you at least remember your own name.”

“Of course,” the confused mortal said without hesitation. Or no verbal hesitation. The mortal did stop. Blue, empty eyes focused on George. George stared back.

“You don’t remember your own name.”

“Nope.” The answer sounded like the mortal was happy. Why would he be happy he had forgotten his name? Was he also attempting to be attractively cheerful? “I think whatever Time used me to do cost me a lot of my memories. Maybe even all of them. You...wouldn’t want to fill me in?”

“No,” George said shortly. The confused mortal seemed to gain wither effect before George continued. “But I know someone who would be more than happy to help.”

“Oh? Who?”

“Follow me and I’ll take you to him.”

“Okay,” the confused mortal agreed. He skipped closer to George. XD had never met such a bizzare mortal.

“XD, could you take us to where Sapnap is?”

“Sure,” XD boomed, and the bizarre mortal’s bounce wobbled as he stared up at the celestial. XD tilted his wide, open grin at the bizarre mortal. The mortal shivered. Which was strange. It was not especially cold here.

Floating forward, XD lead the two mortals towards the others gathered outside of his Admin’s barrier. The simply built care center was not hard to find; though the mortals there should work on their welcome. XD had much to learn about mortals, but he knew pulling out weapons and pointing them at guests did not feel welcoming.

“What the f\*\*\*\* is that?” asked a mortal with red and blue glasses.

“An immortal overpowered being,” George said. XD giggled. The mortal with the red and blue glasses trembled. George rolled his eyes. XD did not see them, but he knew his friend well. “If you want to hurt him, you’re going to need more than an enchanted ax.”

“Is he going to hurt us?” asked another mortal. He was wearing a mask that covered his whole head except for his eyes. The poor mortal did not seem to get the whole point of wearing a mask. Why would you hide every facial feature except the one that gives access to your soul?

“Not unless you p\*\*\*\* him or me off.” George stopped in front of the foolishly masked mortal. “Did Tubbo tell you about my scan of Dream?”

“Yes,” said the masked mortal. “Though I think a good portion of us had already suspected that they were not under the Egg anymore.”

“The real surprise was finding out about Ghostbur,” the mortal with the red and blue glasses said...eagerly? He did not sound happy. Annoyed? Upset? “Shoulda figured Wilbur would find a way to f\*\*\*\* things up from beyond the grave. The f\*\*\*\*\* cherry on top is that he didn’t even struggle out of Hell himself. He got his mommy’s help. P\*\*\*\*\*.”

“Point is, Tubbo filled us in after you wandered off,” the masked mortal said. “Did you run off to get this guy?”

The masked mortal pointed at him, and XD made the wide grin on his mask glow. The masked mortal stopped pointing, and uncovered maroon eyes narrowed. Good to know that some mortals here knew to scrutinize XD more closely.

“XD, stop it,” George said without turning to look at him. XD’s grin flipped upside-down briefly before returning to its normal, non-glowing state. “I ran off to get him to get *him* .”

George quirked a thumb in the bizarre mortal’s direction. The bizarre mortal dug a hand out of his hoodie to wave awkwardly.

“Either of you happen to know who I am?” the bizarre mortal asked with a basic smile. The two other mortals looked at each other, and they communicated with each other. Nonverbally

and not telepathically because mortals did not have the capacity for mental transmissions. XD had checked.

“Is he suffering from memory loss?” asked the masked mortal. The tone the mortal took was oddly unattached from any emotion. Did the masked mortal not care about the bizarre one? Perhaps they had never been friends? Normal mortals emoted regularly, so what was wrong with this one? “Did he take a blow to the head? Eat anything strange? Any signs of a viral infection?”

“He said he lost it traveling through time.”

The masked mortal’s maroon eyes did not roll or narrow, but they still communicated... confusion? Anger? By a slight widening of the eyes perhaps?

“So no obvious bump to the head or signs of cranial swelling?” the masked man continued.

“Nope,” the bizarre mortal said with that same tone that sounded obviously cheerful. “I really did lose them traveling through time. Apparently I brought a passenger with me this time too. A guy named Dream?”

“The delusion is strong,” the masked mortal said. He appeared to be talking to himself despite all the other mortals present. XD was once again ignored, but that was normal for mortals. They could not handle his presence if they thought on it too long. George and his Admin were exceptions.

“No s\*\*\*\*, Sherlock,” the mortal with the red and blue glasses stated shortly.

“Dream told me he time-traveled,” George said crossing his arms. Uh oh. He was upset *and* angry. “Said the Egg used Karl to take him back in time.”

“No f\*\*\*\*\* way,” the mortal with the red and blue glasses remarked. “When the f\*\*\*\* did Dream time travel? To right before he destroyed the b\*\*\*\*\* Egg?”

“He said he came back right after the whole Manberg thing,” George explained, but his arms were still crossed.

“But then wouldn’t he have been able to stop the b\*\*\*\*\* Egg sooner?”

“Yes,” George said. The crossed arms tightened into each other, and XD wondered if he had learned enough about mortals to find an excuse to leave. He could leave without warning, but last time he had done that while George had been this upset-angry, he had regretted coming back very quickly. XD did not want to stop visiting George.

“Karl and Dream could be having a shared delusion,” the masked mortal offered. So the mortal was not as foolish as his impractical mask suggested.

“Or Dream could have made it up and had Karl play along.”

XD’s wings flapped and fluttered on either side of his grin. He had not considered that option. But then he had first-hand proof. Oh. He should probably share that.

“Admin Dream is telling the truth,” XD boomed. As mortals normally did when he spoke, they all turned to focus their attention on him. The mortal with the red and blue glasses covered his ears which was also common. “As I have part of his code, I also recall the other time.”

“Right. You did say something like that before,” George said, the only mortal unaffected by the power of his declaration. XD tilted his head to convey surprise. Or was it confusion?

“Did you forget?” XD said. “Was my word not good enough? I thought you wanted to ask a stranger about that time so that I would not have to remember that cruel time?”

“Cruel? Why would it be cruel? Because somehow Tommy convinced me and Sapnap that Dream hated us? Because me and Sapnap didn’t want to support whatever s\*\*\*\* Dream started next in that other timeline and helped push him out of a position of power? Because we didn’t visit him after he was deposed and ran a literal prison?”

“He was tortured,” XD said cheerily, too like the bizarre mortal. He did not like the feelings those memories brought. He had to grin them away.

“Tortured?” asked the masked mortal.

“Yes,” XD chirped. He focused on looking at George. XD was happy. Those memories were not his. He could only remember them in broken pieces. “After being abandoned by everyone he ever cared for and locked away to never see the light of day.”

The mortal’s faces had all stretched and contorted in a familiar way. Those were expressions of horror and despair. Expressions XD was intimately familiar with since he had once enjoyed causing them. But that was before he took this form. Before finally assimilating this Admin’s code.

“How?” the masked mortal asked. His voice was shaking. “How could—why would anyone turn against him? Was he already working with the Egg?”

XD tilted his head again. “No. He was locked up long before the Egg made a bid for the world in that time. All you mortals locked him away in that obsidian box you remade because you feared him.”

“Remade? Obsidian?” the mortal with the red and blue glasses parroted. Did these mortals not have anything better than to repeat his words or ask the same questions? If it were not for his friend George—

“Pandora? We threw him in Pandora?” the masked mortal said in a tone that was not full horror. Perhaps partial anger?



“You did,” XD confirmed. Maybe the mortals were not as slow-witted as they had appeared.

“F\*\*\*\*!” yelled the mortal with the red and blue glasses. “We should let him know that we know the b\*\*\*\*\* Egg’s all gone and that we’re all good. That none of that will happen again.”

“Why? Do you think he’ll listen to us?” George said, grabbing the other two mortal’s attentions along with XD’s. “Dream’s been hiding behind a barrier this whole time! Why would he stop now?”

“He’ll come back out,” the mortal with the red and blue glasses said, tilting and adjusting the odd lenses. “He’s the f\*\*\*\*\* Admin. It’s his job to keep the SMP from going to s\*\*\*\*.”

“Like he did after he came back?” George said. No. He accused. He was upset with Dream. Maybe XD should offer to bring him Dream to smite? But XD should not do that. Not to his Admin. But if George wanted to get rid of the Admin, now was the perfect time. Should XD offer?

“Did you not hear what that creepy thing said?” the masked mortal said. Was the mortal referring to XD? “He was tortured. After being put in Pandora. And I’ve seen the place first hand. Sam—Sam wanted to show it off. That place—I thought it was from the depths of the Egg’s most wicked visions.”

“You agreed to put Skeppy in there,” George stated with a scowl. XD did not like seeing his friend upset.

“I didn’t. Sam agreed for me,” the masked mortal said, still low in pitch and now crossing his arms. An obvious show of anger. The masked mortal did not get to be angry at XD’s friend. “And he planned to put the SMP’s worst evil in the heart of the prison: a glorified isolation room.”

“After what Bad did—”

“No, you’re not getting it!” the masked mortal *yelled* . At George. “What if instead of Bad, it was Dream who was considered—”

Heat. Orange blinding light. Pain.

“ENOUGH!” XD bellowed.

All the visible mortals collapsed onto the ground. Two others crawled out of the ramshackle care center while the bizarre mortal surreptitiously crawled into it. The sheep-based mortal pointed a sword at XD. He instantly coded it out of existence. The smaller goat-based mortal from earlier rushed to help the masked mortal up. XD floated down to do the same for George.

His hand was smacked away from where it had hovered near his body. The disconnected white-gloved hand stopped nine blocks from him and zoomed back up his green flowing sleeve. George stood up by himself.

“What the f\*\*\*\* was that?” the goat mortal whispered.

“Ask that thing,” the masked mortal said, hand and finger pointing at XD. The mortals turned their attention to him as one, and XD itched to smite them all.

“What the f\*\*\*\* was that?” George repeated loudly. As if he was following the masked mortal’s orders. But no. George did not follow anyone’s orders. He had too much of an independent strength.

“He was yelling at you,” XD whined. George stared at him hard. His friend knew him too well. “He kept reminding me of the cruel ti—”

“Okay. We get it! In that other time, Dream suffered so much pain that even a celestial that likes smiting people for fun doesn’t like thinking about it,” George said quickly. He was still

angry and upset. Why? ...maybe XD should not have bellowed. “Point is that he needs to get his a\*\*\* out here so we can all properly talk to him.”

“Don’t we have to wait until he wakes up from—you know,” the goat mortal said. He flapped his hands in incomprehensible hand signs.

“Maybe,” George said quietly. He looked up at XD. “Can you do something about that?”

“Can I do something about what?” asked XD.

“Dream fainting,” George said. “You’ve told me that you and Dream are connected somehow. And your code has strings that were definitely once his. Can you wake him up?”

“I could,” XD said. His tiny wings fluttered. “Why?”

“Would you do me a favor and wake him up?”

“But Friend George,” XD said in a mortal whine for effect. He knew George would not want him to wake up the Admin because— “To wake him up, I would have to give him back his code.”

“Okay. Can you do that?”

The question caused XD’s Admin code to grow cold and then burn. His celestial code shook under the harsh sensation. He regained control over his code and tried again. “I could but I would lose my connection to this world.”

“You’d live, right? A celestial can tie or untie themselves from a world without any real consequences.”

“A celestial without a tie to a world cannot influence it,” XD spoke, the celestial echo gone from his voice. “I would become an observer with the inability to interact with anyone on the world but its Mother and Admin.”

“You would still be there,” George said, black lenses flashing as they tilt up towards XD. “And I’m sure Dream would give you back the code as soon as he could. He seems perfectly okay giving away Admin powers to people he has known less than a year over the friends who have been with him for years.”

XD knew he should have nothing inside his hollow chest, but he wondered maybe this Admin’s code had changed that too. A heavy metaphoric weight was crashing through him where most mortals claimed to have a heart.

“A celestial cannot reaccept code from the same Admin,” XD found himself saying blandly. But his friend George knew what he was doing. Knew what he was asking. And George never hesitated to ask XD for a favor.

“The Blade’s an Admin now. He could give you code instead.”

XD should have clarified that the Admin code had to come from the world’s primary Admin, or the connection to the world would not form. He should explain that giving an Admin back his code meant XD was giving up his place in this world. Permanently. He should have repeated that Mother had asked him already to give the code up for the sake of the Admin, and he had vehemently refused because he did not want to leave.

But how could he say “no” to his best friend. Friends did not—George said that friends did not deny their friends anything. XD did not want to be a bad friend. Not to the one mortal who had taken time to show him what mortal friendship was. Who had sparked an indescribable drive to interact with the world that XD did not have before. He would do this, and he would take the lessons friend George taught him to the next world he spawned in. But to be certain...

“Do good friends ask for favors that can lead to their friend’s erasure?”

“It’s not erasure, XD,” George said, eyes certainly rolling behind black lenses. “You’ll just go back to observer mode. It’ll be fine. Because, no, friends don’t ask friends to do things that will ‘erase’ them. Again, I’m not asking for you to ‘erase’ yourself. The Blade will give you code back once we talk sense back into Dream.”

“How can you know that for sure?” the masked mortal asked. George did not even look at him.

“Because I know code, I know XD, and I know Dream. Everything will be fine. Won’t it, XD?”

“If friend George is sure,” XD said, raising his voice back into a boom. “I will miss you, friend George!”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll miss you too, XD. But it won’t be too long. I promise.”

XD knew friend George believed that. But friend George did not understand code as much as he believed he did. Nor did he know XD as well as he thought he did. XD was not mortal. Perhaps George did not know Admin Dream either, but that did not matter to XD. What difference would Admin Dream’s willingness to bring XD back matter? Admin Dream was mortal.

XD floated down and pressed his face’s open-wide grin to his favored mortal’s forehead, hoping the subtle blessing would hold after he left. He then teleported himself above his Admin’s bed.

A couple of cries came from the mortals surrounding the Admin’s bed, but XD ignored them. He cared little for the mortals who had allowed his Admin to fall into this state. A dark figure blocked him from nearing the unconscious Admin.

“Why are you here?” asked the dark—the demon. The heavy brokenness in XD’s hollow chest was replaced by eager viciousness. As he gathered the Admin’s code to return it, his personal memories deepened into clarity.

He had seen this demon claw his way out of the Aether. Had seen him shed his cruellest instincts and eschew his strongest powers to live among humans. Had even at one point shared codes with this demon on another world only to have the experience backfire on them both. He had not followed the demonic fool onto this world, but he had been compelled to view the demon's life here and had found the Admin here interesting. If anyone were to blame for his newfound painful chest cavity, it would be this demon.

"I plan to give him back full guardianship of the world," XD lied. The demon's precious Admin would not bear the weight of this world alone. Not with his secondary Admin and the world's Mother at his back. The demon's white eyes narrowed and twitched in easy-to-read dismissal and disbelief. XD's thin lie had been seen through. The powerful green code separated fully from XD's, and he crackled. "You know well how this goes."

"Are you sure?" the demon said, his voice growing soft. The demon's soul was always so frustratingly soft. Except when it should be. "He has a co-Admin—"

"My friend asked me to help the Admin," XD snipped. He did not want this demon's pity. "I will do him the favor."

"Does George know—"

"Silence," XD bellowed. He barely noted the other mortals' reactions over the demon's barely there trembling. The demon did not remember. But his code had not forgotten. XD's chest lightened. George would not forget. "Mother has asked. Friend George has asked. I will strengthen the fading Admin."

The demon's trembling limbs folded back into his body, and he landed on the ground to step out of the way.

"Thank you, Prime Child," the demon said with a hand over his heart and bow low enough to show his wing's roots. XD appreciated the open sign of respect. He floated down and jammed the code back into the Admin. The code instantly ran and tucked itself back into the Admin's numbered strings.

The world around XD dimmed as he faded from it. And then XD was gone.

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~~“Friend George said to give you my code. Do not make him regret it.”~~

The words faded through Dream’s mind as he opened his eyes. Blue eyes stared straight into his soul from above.

“...Tommy?” The question croaked from his throat.

“He’s awake!” the blond gremlin yelled. Dream’s ears rang as the boy zoomed out from in front of his face. “F\*\*\*\*\* finally!”

“Are you okay?” came another thankfully quieter voice. Bad lagged into view, and black, clawed fingers framed Dream’s vision. “What hurts?”

“Bad, you need to back off. You’ll smother him,” said a feminine voice. Pink flashed into view, and the fingers retreated into smaller human hands. Niki’s face appeared next to Bad’s. “*Are* you okay?”

“His code seems fine,” drawled a voice from the other side of the bed. Dream rolled his head in that direction. Yellow screens danced along lenses covering blood red eyes. Their owner gave a relieved chuff. “It actually looks better than before the creepy eldritch abomination slammed that mess of code into him.”

“He got enough of his code back to recover his strength,” said a fifth voice. Red and green eyes peered over Techno’s shoulder. “Or at least that’s what Ender says. He also says that we should find a way to restrain him before he makes himself worse again.”

“Papa bad!” came a cry from much closer. Tiny, sharp hands poked at his chest, and a growingly heavier weight plopped onto his chest. A small “oof” escaped him, and black claws scooped the weight up before Dream could regather his breath. A tiny but potent voice cried loudly, “No! Let go! Papa bad! Papa need to stay!”

“Let him go, Bad,” Niki said in her “why do I put up with you idiots” tone. Weird. He did not think she would have to use it on Bad.

“He was hurting him,” Bad whined. To someone not named Skeppy. That should have felt stranger than it did.

“He’s a kid whose dad keeps nearly killing himself,” Niki said sharply. Oh. The tone was not for Bad. It was for Dream. That made sense. “Let him sit on his stupid dad if he wants to.”

“Fine,” Bad conceded. Blurrily, Dream could almost make out the tall demon’s pout. The black hands lowered the still squealing Peace back onto Dream’s chest. “You can sit on him. Just be careful, okay?”

“O’ay,” the sniffling tiny piglin said, before flopping onto Dream hard enough to gain another “oof.” A snuffling snort sounded from his right, and Dream glared at the full-grown piglin hybrid who was barely hiding his chuckling.

“Does anything hurt?” Bad repeated, and Dream rotated his head back in the demon’s direction.

“Maybe?” Dream admitted through a strained, hoarse throat. Tiny pink piglin ears perked up, and the weight on his chest shifted. “Everything feels strained more than hurt.”

“Like after the 4 Hunter Finale?”

“Yeah,” he croaked. “Like that.”



“Then all you need is rest, muffinhead,” Bad said. He might have been smiling. Or grimacing. Dream squinted his eyes to focus. Of course, Bad noticed. “Is something wrong with your eyes?”

“Everything’s blurry,” Dream admitted. There was no point trying to hide it. They would bully the truth out of him somehow.

“This might be a stretch, but it could be that your body is exhausted and needs more rest,” snorted Techno. Dream’s head refused to roll back over to face his fellow Admin. “Since the idiots finally decided to go back to their little government-controlled town, you should take the chance to enjoy a nice long break before they plan their next stupid thing. If that stupid thing happens before you get twelve hours of sleep and we are in absolute, desperate need of a half-dead Admin’s help, we’ll send the gremlin to wake you up.”

“Hey! Who the f\*\*\*\* said I wanted to go wake him up again?”

“The blond boy an hour ago when Bad brought him in,” Niki said, and Dream could almost see her eye roll. “We had to have Ender hold you down to keep you from diving in and disturbing him.”

“I still don’t think it was very f\*\*\*\*\* fair that he can do that and didn’t bother to tell anyone!”

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“𐌲𐌹𐌺𐌰 𐌲𐌹𐌺𐌰 𐌲𐌹𐌺𐌰, 𐌲𐌹𐌺𐌰.”

“I really hope I don’t have to ‘language’ you, too,” Bad muttered. “Does anyone else understand him except Dream?”

“Peace do!” said the weight on Dream’s chest. The pressure changed position. “Ender said Tommee 𐌲𐌹𐌺𐌰!”

“Oh, um...thank you for explaining that. That was very helpful,” Bad said awkwardly. Dream wheezed out a short, quiet laugh. Techno grunted his disapproval.

“Don’t know about you guys, but I think it’s time we leave the invalid to rest before he gives into his self-destructive instincts and decides to take the half the server on by himself for some ridiculous reason his sad excuse of a brain came up with.” Dream snorted softly, but Techno continued as if he heard nothing. “I have a feeling he might, and this is a rather bold assumption on my part, *might* fall asleep and rest if we leave him alone.”

“Peace stay?”

“Fine, brat. But then your babysitter stays too.”

“Ender asks if he can sit on Dream if he wakes up,” said someone. Someone Dream knew. Someone he...he cared about?

“...Plan B. Halo stays.”

“No! Now that the rest of the d\*\*\*\*\* have stopped attacking us, he needs to go get the records of Dream’s manhunts.” Manhunts were fun. Maybe Techno would finally do one with him now?

“Language! Why would I ever get those for someone who cannot stop cursing in front of a toddler?!”

“Duckhead.” Quack.

“Duckies are cute, aren’t they?”

“Did you seriously just say that duckies are f—”

“Language.” Ouch. Angry Dad Bad growl.

“—freaking cute?”

“They are. Technoblade, have you learned how to ban someone from an area yet?” Huh. Even Dream was not sure how to do that without barrier blocks yet.

“Nope. But it’s amazing how much I can figure out using my amazing skills and pure dumb luck.”

“Would a ghost make good practice?”

“Tommy put down that sword! And Bad! I expected better from you. How’s about this? I stay with Dream, Bad goes to get the manhunt recordings, and Tommy and Ranboo go with you, Techno, to back up Skeppy and make sure everyone outside the barrier goes back to Kinoko like they agreed to.” Niki to the rescue. She was amazing.

“Fine.”

Noises followed, but Dream could barely figure them out when a soft pressure stroked his forehead.

“Go to sleep, Dream. We’re all fine. You’re fine. Please—please. Trust us.”

More strangeness. Niki was the smartest one of them all. She should know that he trusted them. He just wanted to protect them. To keep them safe.

Because somewhere along the way, they had become his. His attachments. His family. His world.

And he found he couldn't watch his world burn around him again.

## Chapter End Notes

This story that has been over two years in the making is coming to a close. Part of me is very sad to see it go. The rest of me wants to finish and move to focus on other stories. Ones that have been waiting in the wings for so long. But before I do, I wanted to know what you, dear readers, would like to read before the end of this story closes. So if there's a character or storyline you would like to see highlighted or ended, please let me know. I cannot promise to write all of them, but I will fit as many as possible in the last chapter. If not, I will try to explain what happened to the character or storyline in a comment reply.

May all of you enjoy your summer/winter!

And special thanks to Ayonne who took the time to beta this chapter. Seriously, the quality is so much better after Ayonne's help.

Also Ender Translation:

I do not go around subjecting myself to touching cretins if I do not have to.

ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ ὁ βλάσφημος. — You heard him, cretin.

# And the World Smiled

## Chapter Summary

Dream has learned to live well.

## Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter is massive. It's why it was not posted a week after the last one like I had planned.

Major thanks to Ayonne who has helped edit and polish several chapters and this behemoth in specific. And to all the readers who have read this far. Thank you for reading to the end. This is the first massive writing project I have ever finished, and I hope you all enjoy the ending.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream stood at the boundary of their “bubble” and stared out at a very poorly built structure. Niki had said that the thing housed most of Kinoko while they recovered from their “battle” against the big bad Syndicate, or rather against several hostile, overpowered mobs and one annoying ghost. Thinking about Niki’s still healing wound, Dream should have had Sapnap and his group go against the mobs *with* Bad and Ender added into the mix.

“You gonna to make them leave?”

Dream nodded. A hand patted his upper arm, and a dopey grin tilted up at him.

“Want me to go with you?”

“No, you stay here with Bad,” Dream said. He gave Skeppy a small smile of his own before sliding his mask into place. “It might be better for them not to see you right now.”

“Meh. I bet even Sappy’s gonna think twice before putting anyone in prison after the whole invisible creepers thing,” Skeppy said with a shrug. He rocked back on his heels and bounced slightly. “Man. I wish I had gotten to see that. Think you could maybe let me use one of those sometime?”

“Depends. Is it going to result in a muffin shortage?”

“What?! You think I would try using one against my BFF? How could you say such a thing?” the diamond golem gasped. Dream let his mask stare at him. “Come on. You know I wouldn’t waste an opportunity like that. Bad would probably see them somehow with his demon/moderator abilities. Now, it might be fun to watch the Technoblade freak out over his potato fields exploding for no reason...”

“Yeah,” Techno drawled from where he had appeared behind Skeppy. The diamond golem’s obsidian eyes seemed to shrink at the word. “Hilarious. Though it would be doubly hilarious to see an infamous troll running from a horde of invisible zombies when he remembers that ‘the Technoblade’ is also an Admin.”

“Oh, hello, Techno. Didn’t hear you coming.”

“Bruh. Of course you didn’t. I teleported here to make sure our overgrown squealer didn’t try to leave without me.”

“I was waiting for you,” Dream huffed. “Also, stop calling me that!”

“What? Overgrown squealer? Speak my language like an adult, and I’ll consider it.”

“I can speak it perfectly! Bad has no trouble understanding me!”

“Halo has no trouble understanding your literal child either. He also knows how to speak like an adult Piglin.”

“We sound exactly the same!”

“No. Tech’s right. Bad’s got a lower pitch when he grunts and squeals and stuff,” Skeppy piped up. “Which is really sad considering it’s *Bad* .”

“What? Are you seriously—” Dream sputtered. He glared at the diamond golem. “I am going to tell Bad you said that.”

“Ah, yes. Halo’s going to be so disappointed to learn he speaks better Piglin than you do,” Techno said. “Truly devastating information.”

“I was talking about saying he’s *Bad* !”

“He is Bad. That’s his name,” Skeppy smirked.

“That’s not what you—You meant it like—You said it’s *Bad* .”

“Meant it like what? Are you saying that Bad being Bad is a bad thing? Wow, I didn’t know you thought so little of Halo,” Techno said, teeth poking out of his grin. Dream grumbled, groaned, and gave up.

“Can we go wake up my former best friend now before I find a reason to try to erase you both from the server?”

“You have some serious issues if you can’t handle us calling you out without having a mental breakdown,” Techno continued. “Might want to work on that.”

“I hate you. I hate you both.”

“Aw. I love you, too, Dreamie,” Skeppy said, wrapping his arms around Dream’s slouched shoulders and standing on tiptoes to plant a wet, slop of a kiss on Dream’s cheek. “I’ll convince Bad to have muffins for you when you get back.”

“The question is whether or not those muffins will survive long enough for us to eat them with you there,” Techno said flatly.

“No promises,” Skeppy sang as he skipped on the path that went between the fields and towards the house. He only made it a few paces before he paused and turned around. “If you don’t come back in two hours, I’m not responsible for any demon rampages, so try not to take too long! And come back in one piece!”

The diamond golem gave them one last wave and continued to skip towards the far-off house.

“So,” Techno drew out the word. “Ready to go?”

“Considering I was out here waiting for you, I think it’s safe to say I am more than ready,” Dream said, barely holding back the snap in his voice. “I should have considered the ramifications of having two trolls in our house.”

“Hyeh?! What is this? Is this a personal attack?! How dare you call me a troll! That is a gross misjudgment of my character! I demand a formal apology in your finest handwriting in order to recover from such slander.”

“Sure. As soon as you pay for the months of therapy I will need to have thanks to your—your personality,” Dream said, trying to keep his own tone flat but fumbling at the end. His ears burned. He decided to focus on the barrier block’s code as he removed a 4 by 4 block range of them.

“My personality,” Techno replied. “Nice to know your comebacks are at the same level as your proficiency in my native tongue.”



“My comebacks are just fine,” Dream grumbled. The barrier blocks disappeared, and he walked through the opening. Techno followed and turned briefly to replace the removed blocks.

“I dunno who told you that, but they were lying.”

“How do I know you’re not the one who’s lying?”

“Because I am the most trustworthy co-Admin around.”

“You’re the only co-Admin around.”

“Yeah? So?”

Dream deliberately snorted lowly, and the very large Piglin hybrid at his side grunted back and patted his head. His Nightmare ax was in hand, and Dream was swinging for his idiotic co-Admin’s head. Techno ducked and caught the second swing on his Orphan Obliterator. Dream threw his weight onto his ax and then abruptly yanked it back, but his rival barely stuttered in his steps and took a swing of his own.

Dream raised his ax to block, the impact sending harsh vibrations up his arms. The two jumped back. They stared at each other from across ten blocks, and Dream saw that his masked smirk was on full display on the dumb pig’s face. It had been a while since they had gotten to exercise their skills. Dream's code was thrumming with the anticipation of a challenge. On an unheard signal, the two charged at each other.

Ax and sword sliced and clanged into each other, once, twice, three times. Dream ducked under a blow and slashed at his rival’s ridiculously frilly shirt. Techno spun away and swung lower at Dream’s left side. Reflexively equipping his shield, Dream let the large sword clang against the wood and iron.

“Are you two done?”

The sword slipped down the shield as Dream’s stance wobbled. The sword quickly retreated backwards and a hand took its place and grabbed the shield, helping to steady Dream. He took a breath, put away the shield, and faced a very grumpy George.

“I see you’re feeling better,” George said, scowling. “Going to thank me for sending XD to wake you up?”

“So the floating possible eldritch abomination thing appearing over Dream’s bed was your doing?” Techno asked, moving to stand slightly in front of Dream. Dream held back the urge to pull him back. He knew best how vicious George could be. But Techno...Techno could handle himself. He was the Technoblade for a reason. (Bad and Niki both kept telling him that they could all handle themselves, and if any of them could, it was for sure Techno.)

“Yes. I sent him because apparently Dream was missing some vital code to keep himself upright. He’s always had a nasty habit of overdoing himself.”

He bit his tongue. He really did not need George giving Techno and the others more reason to try to force him to “slow down.”

“He does,” Techno agreed evenly. Dream was going to hear about this later, he knew it. “We thought you went back to Kinoko.”

“It’s funny you would think that when one of my best friends is stuck here in a f\*\*\*\*\* coma and the other was unconscious,” George bit. “But then you wouldn’t know better, would you?”

“You’re right. I wouldn’t,” Techno said. His blood red gaze peered down his nose. George crossed his arms and stared back. Behind his mask, Dream let his eyes flit between them. Neither was backing down, and he was starting to wonder if he should have brought Niki or maybe Bad. He cleared his throat loudly and pointed towards the makeshift care center.

“We came to wake up Sapnap so you can go back to Kinoko.”

“Good to see your manners haven’t changed,” George said, sarcasm heavy and dripping. Dream inwardly cringed.

*“Friend George said to give you my code. Do not make him regret it.”*

“Thank you George for sending XD,” Dream said, his insides twisting in on themselves. He felt the faint remnant of sadness and fondness for the bespectacled moderator that wasn’t his anymore . XD had helped stabilize his code because of George. Dream pushed down his own anger and bitterness and how he missed them . “How did you convince XD of all people to sacrifice the code I gave him and cut his ties to this world?”

“I reminded him that there were two Admins on this world right now, so he can come back whenever he wants.”

A grunt squealed questioningly, and Dream almost missed the sound in his shock. Did George really think—?

“He has to have the world’s Admin’s code, not any old Admin code. He can’t come back by using Techno’s.”

George’s composure shook, and his hands dropped to his sides. They balled up into fists.

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not,” Dream said softly. XD had asked for one favor, and Dream had immediately fumbled the request. “I wish I was. XD made things easier to regulate on the SMP, especially when it came to the End. I am going to have to work out a system to cover for his efforts. If it was not for him focusing all his power on sealing the End, the Egg would have corrupted this world to the core.”

“So you’re saying that XD did all that, and you won’t let him back on the server?”

“It’s not a matter of letting, he can’t—”

“You’re good at finding ways around the rules. You even cheated time! You can find a way to reconnect XD to the world.”

Dream gripped his ax. What could he say? George believed him about the time travel now, so maybe he could link the explanation of time travel with inter-world coding—

“Yeah, I’m gonna to stop you right there,” Techno stepped in. “As co-Admin, I’ve made the executive decision that any request for Admin assistance should go through me so as to keep our Admin from ‘over-doing’ himself.”

“Co-Admin?” George scathed. “So you can bring XD back.”

“Hyeh? How did you get that from what I said?”

“Co-Admin does not mean he is an equal Admin on the server,” said Dream. He moved to stand next to Techno. “No more than a co-pilot would be of equal responsibility to a pilot. The world is tied deeply to my person—”

“No offense man, but I don’t think he cares,” Techno interrupted. “If he hasn’t gotten it by now, he won’t get it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?!” George snapped, teeth clacking audibly.

“That you’re still an idiot.”

“Okay!” Dream jumped in, discomfort fighting in his chest. His mask faced Techno head on. “Time to go wake Sapnap up. Remember what Skeppy said.”

“What did Skeppy say?” asked George. Dream forced his muscles not to tense. His mask peered over his shoulder at the rogue moderator.

“We need to be back in less than two hours.”

“Why? Are you working on some time sensitive project? Is *Skeppy* helping?”

“Sort of,” Dream hedged. “He *is* keeping the time from running out.”

“How? Skeppy’s not a moderator. I mean, he has experience caretaking a server, but he isn’t great with code. Wouldn’t someone more well-versed in code be a better choice for that?”

Dream’s mask rotated back over to Techno who grunted quietly and shrugged. Looking back at George, his body grew rigid. He knew that expression on George’s face too well.

“He has the best qualifications for what he is doing,” Dream answered stiffly, hoping not to set George off more. Not that anything would work when George was like this. “We need to get to waking up Sapnap now.”

Trying and failing to loosen his clenched muscles, Dream marched past George. The black lenses glinted in his direction once before turning their full fury on the hybrid warrior behind him. Dream’s stomach curled and sunk in his gut, but he continued into the building and towards where Techno had said Sapnap’s room was.

A large half-fixed hole remained in the front room, and Dream dodged around it to enter the hall leading to the rooms in the back. He walked to the only one that still had light stretching

out under the door and put a hand on the knob. Three deep breaths later, he opened the door and paused at the room's entrance. Karl sat next to the bed.

The time traveler blinked at him and swung his feet under and out the chair beneath him. "Hi! I'm Karl, or so I've been told. I'm going to guess you're that Dream guy everyone keeps talking about. That mask seems to be pretty iconic.."

"Hello, Karl," Dream said slowly. He pried his fingers off the door knob and took a step into the room. "I am Dream. I am here to help Sapnap."

"This guy, right?" Karl said, pointing at the sleeping figure on the bed. "People keep saying we were close. You wouldn't happen to know if that's true."

"It was," Dream answered. "Very close. Did—did anyone tell you how close?"

"Nope," Karl said with a popping 'P.' "They said he should be the one to tell me."

"He should," Dream said hesitating. "I'm going to wake him up. But when I do—Could you do me a favor?"

"Sure. I don't see why not," Karl said easily. Behind his mask, Dream felt a small smile form. Karl would always be Karl. "You know, just in case no one's told you, that mask is creepy. I don't know if that's the effect you were going for because a smiley face is supposed to be happy or fun, but on that white mask, it gives off really creepy vibes."

"Then it's doing its job."

"Alright, man. If that's what you want."

"It is," Dream said, appreciation for the time traveler growing. He did not have a lot of time before George goaded Techno into relieving the moderator of his head. "When he wakes up,

can you distract him? He cannot see me.”

“Sure. Why?”

Dream held himself perfectly still and kept iron control over his voice.

“I do *not* want to deal with him.”

The words were heavy off his lips, but his chest felt lighter. As if they were truer than even he had realized.

“Huh. Okay. I have a ton of questions for him, so that works for me.”

“Thank you,” Dream breathed. He blinked and watched the black, white, and orange code clack together in a blocked flow. Reaching into the world’s code, he ran the command. The multicolored code began to flow again. Closing his eyes, Dream spun around and darted out the room.

He barely kept himself from colliding into George.

“Dream?” George said startled. For an instant, Dream saw through tinted lenses and into concerned brown eyes. “Did something happen?”

“Sapnap’s awake,” Dream informed George, tearing himself out of George’s path and around Techno.

“Dream! Wait!” George called. Without looking back, Dream knew Techno had blocked George from following him. He considered stopping; considered hoping the concern he had seen was real. He broke out into a full sprint towards the barrier blocks. A second later, he stumbled over a row of potato plants. He consciously shifted his center of gravity to keep himself from face-planting into several half-grown potato plants.

A chuckle caught his attention as he righted himself.

“It is hard to believe that this overgrown squealer is the same guy who used a placed ladder and grabbed it to break his fall in mere seconds. I’m starting to think that ‘manhunts-are-fake’ people might have a point.”

“You suddenly teleported us!” Dream snapped.

“So?” Techno said, confirming he had. “Didn’t look like you wanted to hang around there any longer. I was doing you a favor.”

“You could have warned me,” Dream accused, removing his mask to glare at the Piglin hybrid.

“I could have, but to fool one’s enemy, one needs to fool one’s friend,” Techno said. He stepped off the tilled ground and onto the dirt path. “Now get off my potatoes. You’re ruining them.”

“And who’s fault is that?” Dream grumbled. He pulled his mask to the side and leapt over the four blocks to the dirt path. He landed without a single tremor. He sent a pointed smirk at Techno and was met with a bland expression.

“Should I clap now?” Techno said. Dream’s smirk dropped.

“Whatever,” Dream huffed. He started down the path to their house. “Let’s get back to the others before Skeppy antagonizes Bad into rampaging and tearing through the barrier blocks to find us.”

“Halo’s terrifying, but if Halo could break through barrier blocks, the undone omelet would have taken over the server by now,” Techno snorted.



“Sure. If the Egg had had access to Bad’s full power,” Dream said. He stopped and looked back at Techno full in the face. “Do not underestimate Bad.”

“...okay,” Techno said in slow uncertainty. He grimaced and continued. “Want to talk about what happened back there?”

“...no,” Dream said, moving further down the path. Techno caught up to him and matched his pace.

“Just so you know,” Techno started with uncharacteristic hesitance. “You did need new friends.”

Dream snorted and kept walking.

“But now you have them, so all’s well that ends well and all that.”

He peered at the Piglin hybrid from the corner of his eye. Blood red eyes were not looking directly at Dream and were instead mirroring his own. They were observing him. As if they were worried about his reaction. As if they wanted to check that he was okay. As if—they were concerned.

Dream smiled and bumped the large Piglin hybrid’s arm with his shoulder.

“Too bad they are all annoying.”

“It’s like that saying—how’d it go again? Something about birds of a feather? Chat, help me out. What was it?”

“Shut up,” Dream grumbled. But he did not stop smiling.

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The basement burned with light from the campfire set up in the middle of it. They had moved all the chests and furniture to the far corners in case Dream messed up the ritual. He hadn't exactly explained what he was doing. He had tried, but the words wouldn't—He trusted them. He knew they wouldn't—Not even Tommy—

A clawed hand landed on his shoulder, and Dream realized his breaths had become wild gasps.

“—our, one, two, three, four. Are you back with us?”

“Yeah,” Dream said with shaky words and a shakier smile. “I’m back.”

A loud snort refuted the statement, but Dream snuffed a firm reassurance. A snuffling squeal followed, and Dream glared into amused blood red eyes.

“Techno’s right,” Bad agreed with a poorly hidden amused smile. “You don’t have to push yourself.”

“You haven’t even told us what you’re doing that is so important,” Niki said. She had Peace in her arms, so they were crossed. Worry and frustration wafted off from her. “If it’s going to harm you, maybe we shouldn’t do it? It might be a nice change of pace.”

“Well, given what he’s set up, I’d say he’s going to use the revive book, but he told me he f\*\*\*\*\* can’t, so who knows what he’s up to,” Tommy said, and the rhythm of Dream’s breathing unraveled. He’d forgotten. Tommy—Tommy knew.

A hand pressed against his back, and a count started in his ear, and Dream forced himself back under control.

“Revive book?” asked Niki. Because she didn’t know. Tommy knew. And Tommy would tell them, and they would know. (He wanted them to know. He wanted to do this. *He could trust them.*)

“Yeah. It’s what he got f\*\*\*\*\* tortured over.”

Dream’s erratic breathing grew louder, echoed off the walls deeply into his ears. He needed to steady his breathing; focusing on the noises and presences around him to ground himself. And then he realized that they were all deathly quiet.

“...whaz ‘tortured’?”

Dream blinked and concentrated on his small son. Swallowing one last deep breath, he walked over to Niki and held out his trembling hands. Niki glanced between Peace and Dream’s hands before placing the small Piglin into Dream’s arms. He automatically tucked his child into his chest.

“Hurt,” Dream said with a solitary crack in pitch. “‘Tortured’ means hurt.”

“Papa hurt?” asked Peace. Wide, white eyes gazed up at him wet, and tiny sharp hands dug into his green shirt.

“Yes. A long time ago,” Dream admitted. He pressed his head against his child’s and breathed. “But now, I’m not. And I...I can help someone. Someone who is very hurt. And I... I want to help them.”

“Dream.” He looked up to see that Niki had stepped closer. Hesitantly, she lifted up a hand and slowly placed it on Dream’s upper arm. “You’re still hurt. You don’t have to push yourself if you’re not ready.”

“But I am,” he insisted. “I can do this. The worst part—it’s over. You—you know about the revive book. And I know—I know you won’t hurt me to get it.”

“Anyone with a decent amount of morals and empathy for their fellow sentient beings wouldn’t,” Techno huffed. “Hurray for us. We’ve reached the bare minimum. Still doesn’t mean you’re ready to use the thing you were tortured over; torture that lasted long enough to push you to make a deal with an evil undone omelet.” He paused. “But you’re going to beat yourself up every day until you bring back the guy who tried to kill us because, of course, death is something you can fix. Apparently. Has anyone told you you have main character syndrome?”

“No, I don’t think they have,” Dream said, his lungs relaxing at the familiar tone. *(They didn’t want the book. They were worried more about him .)* “Are you sure they weren’t talking about you?”

“Bruh, do I look like I have hacks that can literally cheat death? That stuff’s saved for main characters like you and Ranboo.”

“Me? What did I do?” the teen spluttered.

“I dunno, man. What do you want me to say? You give main character vibes.”

“I am not the one who can literally cheat death. I am also not the one who can manipulate the world around us at code level,” Ranboo hissed. Ender had really rubbed off on his milder half.

“If I were the main character, half the server would be dead.”

“Sure it would,” Tommy grumbled as he lay in the air above the tall Piglin hybrid. “Most of the server would look like L’Manberg.”

“If you’re going to start a government, you have to pay the consequences,” Techno chuffed. “But I was thinking more along the lines of having my own solo-revenge arc.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Bad said, removing his hand from Dream’s back but loosely tapping his tail against Dream’s calves. A reminder that he was there. “You’re too nice for that.”

“I don’t think you know me well enough for that,” Techno said flatly. Was Dream’s greatest rival blushing?

“Hm. I think I do,” Bad sing-songed. “You’d start but then someone would need help, and you’d get side-tracked and help them.”

“Don’t fall into another delusion. We’re still recovering from the last one,” Techno huffed. Bad flinched, and Dream kicked his leg back slightly into Bad’s tail. White eyes snapped to his. He let Bad see him smile and roll his eyes. Bad grinned brightly back.

“Back to the actual point,” Niki said with blatant exasperation. “How many of us think that if we don’t let Dream do this now, he’ll try to do it behind our backs and hurt himself worse?”

The hands of everyone but Dream shot up. Even Peace, after looking around at the others, raised both his hands high from where he perched in Dream’s cramped grip.

“...you guys think so highly of me.”

“We think very highly of you,” Niki reassured. “It’s your self-preservation instincts we don’t trust.”

“So what do you suggest,” Dream said, gritting his teeth. “We can’t leave Punz and Tommy dead if we can fix them.”

“See?” Ranboo said with a wave of his arm. “ *That’s* main character energy.”

“Eh, I dunno,” Techno said. “I’m starting to agree with Chat. Fixing death is more of a side character thing.”

“Is there a way to bring them back without overexerting yourself?” asked Niki, ignoring the other two.

“Revival is not too taxing,” Dream said. “I can do it.”

“Sure,” Niki said doubtfully. “That’s why you had a panic attack. Let’s try this another way. Can you revive anyone right now?”

Dream opened his mouth. It remained open, and he remained silent. Niki stepped closer. Gently, she took Peace out of Dream’s white-knuckled grip and handed him to Bad, before wrapping her arms around Dream in a loose embrace.

“You don’t have to do anything that hurts you,” Niki whispered. His breath hitched. His body froze. Niki didn’t move. His head fell onto her shoulder. Slowly, Dream’s hesitant arms rose and wrapped around her.

“You know I’ve gotten used to this whole ‘being a ghost thing,’” Tommy said loudly from right above them. “It probably be f\*\*\*\*\* annoying to have to get used to having a solid body again. I’d be bumping into things and s\*\*\*\*\*. Being a ghost suits me better.”

“Liar,” Dream hoarsely whined.

“Who’re you calling a f\*\*\*\*\* liar! Big man Tommyinnit never lies! You take that back!”

Chuckling, Dream angled himself partially out of Niki’s hug and stretched out a hand. Tommy grumbled but took it and let Dream pull him into the hug. Niki giggled as she placed

an arm around him too.

“Looks like Ender and Dream are not the only ones who can touch you now,” Niki said, pecking the teen’s cheek teasingly.

“EW! That’s f\*\*\*\*\* gross! Don’t do that!” Tommy shouted right in both of their ears. He didn’t move out of their embrace. “Maybe the coding is stabilizing to make me solid like Wilbur. About time that kicked in.”

Hope filled the phrase, and Dream didn’t want it to fade. But—

“She can only touch you because she is touching me too,” Dream admitted. Blue eyes stared blankly at him. “Your coding matches mine at its base right now, but it is unstable because the base isn’t yours. If I revived you, then the code would become yours and fully stabilize.”

“Wait,” Tommy said as his face screwed itself up. “Does that mean that I’m kinda related to you?”

“No? At a coding level, yes, we do currently have similar coding—”

“Technically, the code is identical,” Bad interrupted. “Since you used your own code to put Tommy’s back together.”

“You can do that?” Niki said, peering around both Dream and Tommy. Techno snorted. Yellow rectangles overlapped with the lenses perched on his snout as he analyzed Tommy and Dream’s code.

“Given the cracks and seams in it, the overgrown squealer made the code fracture and put itself back to better suit Tommy’s. When Niki is in contact with Dream, the pieces of Tommy’s code that were originally Dream’s react and match Dream’s by making themselves solid. So if someone touches Dream and then touches Tommy, Tommy will be solid.”

“So my code’s like Dream?” Tommy insisted.

“At a basic level, yes,” Techno agreed.

“So that means Dream’s related to me,” Tommy announced. “Take that Boob Boy!”

“I have Dream’s code too!” Ranboo burst. He hurried over and snatched Dream out of Niki and Tommy’s hold. The tall teen carried Dream over to dangle in front of Techno. Dream glared at Techno in warning of what would happen if he started to laugh. The Piglin hybrid smirked before blinking twice and squinting through his glasses.

“Huh. Do you go about donating your code to any troubled teen, or do they have to have some trauma quota they have to meet?” Techno grunted.

“Ender’s from the End. In order to meld with Ranboo, the Enderdragon gave him some of my code so he could remain out of the End for indefinite amounts of time,” Dream said, kicking the tall teens thigh to get the enderman hybrid to let him go. Ender did.

“{w, 8 xwΦiλ. iJ ΔΛΗζοΛw iJ ϙxwΔ m'J HζοπΛ σ wx Ji ≡ Uiλ σ, iΦ iJ πJ.”

“I still can’t understand your s\*\*\*\*\* language, so whatever you said is invalid!” Tommy shot back, maturely sticking out his tongue at the tall teen. Ender hissed meaninglessly and draped himself over Dream.

“As fun as this debate over coding genetics is,” Techno said in a bored drawl. “We have all come to the conclusion that Dream is not reviving anyone? Because if we have, we are going to need to take babysitting shifts.”

“Babysitting shifts?! What—That joke’s bad. Even for your standards,” Dream spluttered.



“No. Your self-preservation skills are the bad joke. I’m being serious.”

“We can work out a schedule later; but, Bad, you want the first shift?” Niki asked.

“Sure. I was thinking of trying out the recipe you gave me for scones,” Bad answered. Dream gave the demon a betrayed look.

“Good idea. But remember: the jam goes before the cream.”

“Got it,” Bad agreed. “Ready to bake, Dream?”

“Do I get a choice?” Dream said wearily.

“Nope,” Bad said, tucking Peace closer to his chest as he crouched under Ender’s arm and pulled Dream towards the kitchen. Dream pouted but did not resist. These scones better be out-of-this-world good. Not that they could be anything less given that they were Niki’s recipe and would be baked by Bad’s hands.

Fantastic baked goods almost made up for the fact that his family had decided he needed to be treated like a toddler. Almost.

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The shadows of his wife’s realm closed behind Phil, and he stretched his semi-solid wings. Despite not needing them to fly in his current state, Phil flapped and spread them wide out of habit as he flew. He quickly reached the familiar orb of barrier blocks and prepared his code to slip through them.

As he squiggled through the protections, he caught sight of a figure zooming through the codes past him. The floating figure turned around, and transparent blue eyes widened.

“Phil?” asked Tommy, and Phil stared back at the boy. “Where the f\*\*\*\* did you come from? Wilbur said you were staying with your wife. Did he lie about that, too?”

“He wasn’t lying. I did send him to tell you I was staying with Kristin,” Phil replied, mentally taking note that Wilbur was being accused of lying. He didn’t like the tone the accusation was taking. “Kristin felt a disturbance in her realm coming from this area and sent me to figure it out.”

“Oh,” the boy said with, what would have been from anyone else, over-exaggerated understanding. From Tommy, that was normal. The brat could be quite the drama king. He had learned some of it from hanging around Wilbur. Okay. Maybe more than some of it. It was nice to see the brat back to himself. Good on Dream for setting that right. Phil had judged the young Admin too harshly upon their first meeting. “Yeah, that would be Dre—Punz. He randomly came back to life. No one knows how. Can’t remember anything or—or anything. He just—f\*\*\*\*\* poof, appeared in our basement. No one has any ideas why.”

“No one, huh?” Phil said, amusement welling up his chest. The brat was lying. He was never as clever with his words as he thought he was, no matter how much he imitated Wilbur. Speaking of Wilbur. “Any chance the mysterious force that revived Punz will target Wil next?”

“No f\*\*\*\* way,” Tommy spat before reeling backwards. “I mean—I don’t f\*\*\*\* know. But it definitely f\*\*\*\* shouldn’t. That f\*\*\*\*\* b\*\*\*\*\* is back with Kinoko. You might want to take him back wherever you came from. The only reason Dream’s not kicked him off the server is because he’s a ghost, and something about ghost code keeps us on the server or some s\*\*\*\*.”

“What did Wilbur do now?” Phil asked, exhaustion seeping into his bones. If he was not immortal in his love’s realm, there was a large chance Wilbur would be driving him to an early grave.

“Why don’t you f\*\*\*\* ask him?” Tommy said, his voice dripping with more anger than Phil had ever heard from the brat. Which was surprising given how attached the brat had been to Wilbur. But then Wilbur had a better time making friends than keeping them. Phil had hoped

Wilbur would have done better by the strangely adorable brat that kept following him around. It was Wilbur's fondness for the boy that had Phil adamantly petitioning Techno to keep the brat in their group when the Egg started to overrun the server.

He did not regret raging against the young Admin over Tommy's fate, but he did regret pushing the Admin into teleporting him and Techno out of the one safe haven on the server. Phil had accepted too many handicaps upon entering the server and had not been able to replicate any of the young Admin's tricks against the Egg. And then he had allowed himself to become infected. In the end, he had needed to turn to the young Admin for help. The kid had done well.

"F\*\*\*\*!" the ghostly brat shouted. He pulled out a compass and furiously floated around in a circle. "Where the f\*\*\*\* did he go?"

"Are you looking for Tubbo?" asked Phil, recognizing the compass as an enchanted one whose arrow pointed towards a person and not a location. Tommy had one for the young goat hybrid, if he recalled correctly.

"Tubbo? No. That one was destroyed by the Egg ages ago," Tommy dismissed distractedly. "Might be a good idea to ask Dream to make a new one so I can get some warning before he just shows up. Last time he brought a nuke and gave Bad a heart atta—There he is!"

He dove down past Phil nearly brushing the dark gray wings. Bemoaning the unending energy of annoying brats, Phil dove back out the barrier and after him. Tommy bolted right at a figure that had been leaping through some treetops near the barrier. The figure dodged Tommy's tackle, flipped towards the ground, hit it without losing momentum, and dashed straight towards the protected sanctuary. The hood and cloak flapping behind the figure did not hide his identity. Dream dashed under Phil and slammed right into the barrier which shimmered and flashed. He stood smirking from the edge of the carrot fields inside the barrier.

Tommy cursed nonstop as the brat floated back upwards and flipped the smirking Dream off. Phil stared as he realized the young Admin was not wearing his trademark mask. Green eyes squinted up smugly at the ghost floating down and to Phil's left, freckles popping out of grinning cheeks.

“Aw, man,” came a voice from under the trees. Phil watched as a familiar, tall demon emerged and shook several leaves from his horns. “We were so close.”

“Would have been closer if our invisible, untouchable defense had done his job,” said a strongly-missed voice. Before his best friend was out of the woods, Phil had encircled him with his arms and wings. “Hyeh?! Phil?!”

“Phil? How—Wha—? Where’d you come from?” blubbered the demon from entirely too close. Phil angled his back towards the menace to create distance between them and him. A heavy thump against his forehead distracted him from any more maneuvering.

*“Phil. You’re back,”* came the thick, low snort as a forehead forcibly pushed into his and knocked his hat off. *“Wil said you were going to stay with Kristin.”*

The sorrow heavy in Techno’s native tongue grieved Phil, and he pressed his forehead equally as hard into Techno’s.

*“I wasn’t supposed to come back,”* he grunted back. Phil’s heart broke with his friend’s on the next words. *“And I still can’t. I have to stay with Kristin. She had to fully claim me for her realm to eliminate any influence the Egg had. And I gave my Admin powers to you. That doesn’t come at no cost, my friend.”*

“Phil! You’re back!” piped up a voice next to them. Phil took a deep shared breath and pulled away from the man he trusted with his life and more. Shiny obsidian eyes glittered up at him. “Tech’s missed you!”

“Has he? I couldn’t tell,” Phil said as Techno continued to grip his ghostly forearm. “I see you’re doing better, mate. Kristin said that server appears to be clear of any Egg-like viral infections.”

“Dream took care of it,” Skeppy said with a dopey smile and a dismissive wave. Phil grinned back, understanding why Techno had always spoken fondly of the diamond golem. “The whole server’s doing better. But I’ve wanted to ask you something for a while, and since I

have the chance—Did you really have to give Tech your Admin powers? Wasn't he already OP enough?"

Phil burst out laughing. Techno snickered along with him.

"Sorry, mate. I had no choice," Phil said once he caught his breath. "And I don't think Techno would have taken them unless it was an absolute last resort."

"Bruh, think of all the clout I would have missed out on if I had taken you up on your offer the first time. I would have never been invited to any tournament ever."

"He offered to give you Admin powers before?!" Skeppy exclaimed.

"Yes. And he said 'no.' It took a world-ending event for him to even consider taking them," Phil said, his grin baring teeth. "Kristin and I are going to be watching closely to see what he's going to do with them."

"Hold on. Are you leaving?" Skeppy said, the obsidian eyes glittering like flint as it sparked. "But you just got back!"

"I have to," Phil said. "Trust me, if I could stay, I would." He paused and shook his head. "Maybe. For a week or so. It's been centuries since I could wake up every day at my wife's side and snuggle by the fire and kiss her—"

"And that's all I want to know about that," Skeppy said sharply. "Look. I'm going to congratulate Dream on his win and strategize with Bad and Ender on how we're going to take him down next time. You can come by and say 'hello,' or 'goodbye,' or whatever when you're ready."

"Sounds good," Techno said. He snorted a short request for agreement, and Phil nodded. A moment passed, and Techno's ear perked up and blood red eyes scanned the area. He turned to Skeppy who shook his head.

“He left a couple of minutes ago.” Obsidian eyes flicked to Phil, and shimmering blue shoulders shrugged. “I’ll let Ranboo know the game’s over.”

The diamond golem marched through the snow and towards the protected sanctuary.

“Did I miss something?” Phil asked, his head cocking to the side.

“Yeah, you missed a lot, Phil,” Techno said. He put down a block of wood and sat. “How long before you have to go back to Kristin?”

“About an hour since that’s how long Death’s realm allows for investigations into death or life anomalies.”

“Bruh, that sounds like there's a government on the other side.”

“There isn’t,” Phil clarified quickly. Because if there was, his wife would be the head of it. And while a war between his wife and his best friend would be something to see, he did not want to have to take sides. Not to mention that the universe would likely collapse afterwards. “It’s more like rules for reality that have to be kept in check or else the universe could collapse on itself. Not that appears to be a serious problem here. The anomaly just gave me the opportunity to come by and check on you all.”

“I’m going to believe you, Phil. I’m going to believe you. But if we only have an hour, I’m going to have to be quick. See, after you—no, Chat, I am not going to say ‘egged on Dream to kill you.’ That’s low hanging fruit. Phil, Chat said they missed you. There. Are you happy now?—So back to the point, after Dream killed you to save you, he immediately disappeared and took down the undone omelet in one fell swoop. But then the overgrown squealer decided to run off and find a way off his own server, so we had to run after him. And do you know who we found him with? The ghost of brats’ past and the former eggperor himself...”

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Dream ran his fingers over the code in the command and considered not activating it. Remaining in the library and delaying the introduction for another day. Blood red eyed met his in challenge, and he glared back. He ran the command.

They both stood on end stone that stretched out dozens of blocks each way except one. In front of them sat a perch made of bedrock, and over it towered a large reptilian black mass.

[illegible]

“I—I apologize,” Dream said, struggling to keep his voice steady. He had forgotten how large the Mother was. How imposing. *(A large shadow looming over him. Shrinking only to come closer and administer pain.)*

A wide snout nudged itself into his chest.

[illegible]

“Want to let me in on what she’s saying; because, even with Ranboo’s tutoring, I’m only getting about every fifth word,” Techno grumbled. He hissed his best, “ $\sqsubseteq \triangle \cup \cup \circ. \frac{1}{3} \triangle \frac{1}{3} \nmid \wedge \circ \{ \neq \psi \triangle \infty \}.$ ”

Dream smirked and stifled a snicker, trying not to clue in Techno as to what was going to happen next. The Mother crooned a jagged, dragon coo at Techno and pulled out of Dream's chest to huff at the Piglin hybrid's head. She then shot out a giant claw and pulled the squeakily hissing Techno close.

“{⊞,” the Mother sniffed once. She cuddled the large Piglin under her wings. Her head swung back towards Dream. “Ȳ ȬȲ ♂ ∪ ⊞Ȳ Ȭ.”

“ $\sqsubseteq_{\Psi} \sqsubseteq_{\Delta} \{ \sqsubseteq_{\mathfrak{I}} \} \circ \sqsubseteq_{\Delta} \asymp_{\mathfrak{M}} \}$ ,” Dream agreed.

“Dream. Want to tell the several-ton dragon that I am not a cuddler.”

“Hm...No,” Dream said. “It is not good to go against a mother’s instincts.”

“Dream. Buddy. BFF. Please tell me you’re not implying what I think you’re implying,” Techno said strained.

“The way you speak ender makes her see you as a young enderling,” Dream said, his lips splitting to show an uncomfortable amount of teeth. “You should work on your pronunciation.”

Blood red eyes blazed in his direction. “My silence is not weakness, but the beginning of my revenge. Chat. Patience.”

The last two words sent a foreboding shiver down his spine, but he ignored it.

[illegible]



“ $\mathbb{I} \circ \wedge \triangle \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \triangle \overline{\Phi}$ ,  $\mathfrak{h} \notin \subseteq \mathbb{I} U \mathbb{I}$ .  $\triangle U U \triangle \mathfrak{h} \mathfrak{w} \overline{\Phi} \circ \mathbb{I} \wedge \mathbb{I} U \sigma \mathfrak{w}$ .  $\circ \times \mathbb{I} \mathbb{I} \overline{\Phi} \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \triangle \overline{\Phi}$   
 $\mathfrak{h} \circ \mathbb{I} \mathfrak{h} \mathbb{I} \mathbb{I} \neq \mathfrak{w} \mathbb{I} \wedge \sigma \subseteq \mathfrak{w} U \mathbb{I}$ ,  $\triangle \mathbb{I} \triangle \mathfrak{w} U U$ ?”

“𐀡𐀥𐀮𐀵𐀹𐀻𐀽𐀿𐀾𐁂𐁃𐁄𐁅𐁆𐁇𐁈𐁉𐁊𐁋𐁌𐁍𐁎𐁏𐁐𐁑𐁒𐁓𐁔𐁕𐁖𐁗𐁘𐁙𐁚𐁛𐁜𐁝𐁞𐁟𐁠𐁡𐁢𐁣𐁤𐁥𐁦𐁧𐁨𐁩𐁪𐁫𐁬𐁭𐁮𐁯𐁰𐁱𐁲𐁳𐁴𐁵𐁶𐁷𐁸𐁹𐁺𐁻𐁼𐁽𐁾𐁿𐂀𐂁𐂂𐂃𐂄𐂅𐂆𐂇𐂈𐂉𐂊𐂋𐂌𐂍𐂎𐂏𐂐𐂑𐂒𐂓𐂔𐂕𐂖𐂗𐂘𐂙𐂚𐂛𐂜𐂝𐂞𐂟𐂠𐂡𐂢𐂣𐂤𐂥𐂦𐂧𐂨𐂩𐂪𐂫𐂬𐂭𐂯𐂰𐂱𐂲𐂳𐂴𐂵𐂶𐂷𐂸𐂹𐂺𐂻𐂼𐂽𐂾𐂿𐃀𐃁𐃂𐃃𐃄𐃅𐃆𐃇𐃈𐃉𐃊𐃋𐃌𐃍𐃎𐃏𐃐𐃑𐃒𐃓𐃔𐃕𐃖𐃗𐃘𐃙𐃚𐃛𐃜𐃝𐃞𐃟𐃠𐃡𐃢𐃣𐃤𐃥𐃦𐃧𐃨𐃩𐃪𐃫𐃬𐃭𐃮𐃯𐃰𐃱𐃲𐃳𐃴𐃵𐃶𐃷𐃸𐃹𐃺𐃻𐃼𐃽𐃾𐃿𐄀𐄁𐄂𐄃𐄄𐄅𐄆𐄇𐄈𐄉𐄊𐄋𐄌𐄍𐄎𐄏𐄐𐄑𐄒𐄓𐄔𐄕𐄖𐄗𐄘𐄙𐄚𐄛𐄜𐄝𐄞𐄟𐄠𐄡𐄢𐄣𐄤𐄥𐄦𐄧𐄨𐄩𐄪𐄫𐄬𐄭𐄮𐄯𐄰𐄱𐄲𐄳𐄴𐄵𐄶𐄷𐄸𐄹𐄺𐄻𐄼𐄽𐄾𐄿𐅀𐅁𐅂𐅃𐅄𐅅𐅆𐅇𐅈𐅉𐅊𐅋𐅌𐅍𐅎𐅏𐅐𐅑𐅒𐅓𐅔𐅕𐅖𐅗𐅘𐅙𐅚𐅛𐅜𐅝𐅞𐅟𐅠𐅡𐅢𐅣𐅤𐅥𐅦𐅧𐅨𐅩𐅪𐅫𐅬𐅭𐅮𐅯𐅰𐅱𐅲𐅳𐅴𐅵𐅶𐅷𐅸𐅹𐅺𐅻𐅼𐅽𐅾𐅿𐆀𐆁𐆂𐆃𐆄𐆅𐆆𐆇𐆈𐆉𐆊𐆋𐆌𐆍𐆎𐆏𐆐𐆑𐆒𐆓𐆔𐆕𐆖𐆗𐆘𐆙𐆚𐆛𐆜𐆝𐆞𐆟𐆠𐆡𐆢𐆣𐆤𐆥𐆦𐆧𐆨𐆩𐆪𐆫𐆬𐆭𐆮𐆯𐆰𐆱𐆲𐆳𐆴𐆵𐆶𐆷𐆸𐆹𐆺𐆻𐆼𐆽𐆾𐆿𐇀𐇁𐇂𐇃𐇄𐇅𐇆𐇇𐇈𐇉𐇊𐇋𐇌𐇍𐇎𐇏𐇐𐇑𐇒𐇓𐇔𐇕𐇖𐇗𐇘𐇙𐇚𐇛𐇜𐇝𐇞𐇟𐇠𐇡𐇢𐇣𐇤𐇥𐇦𐇧𐇨𐇩𐇪𐇫𐇬𐇭𐇮𐇯𐇰𐇱𐇲𐇳𐇴𐇵𐇶𐇷𐇸𐇹𐇺𐇻𐇼𐇽𐇾𐇿𐈀𐈁𐈂𐈃𐈄𐈅𐈆𐈇𐈈𐈉𐈊𐈋𐈌𐈍𐈎𐈏𐈐𐈑𐈒𐈓𐈔𐈕𐈖𐈗𐈘𐈙𐈚𐈛𐈜𐈝𐈞𐈟𐈠𐈡𐈢𐈣𐈤𐈥𐈦𐈧𐈨𐈩𐈪𐈫𐈬𐈭𐈮𐈯𐈰𐈱𐈲𐈳𐈴𐈵𐈶𐈷𐈸𐈹𐈺𐈻𐈼𐈽𐈾𐈿𐉀𐉁𐉂𐉃𐉄𐉅𐉆𐉇𐉈𐉉𐉊𐉋𐉌𐉍𐉎𐉏𐉐𐉑𐉒𐉓𐉔𐉕𐉖𐉗𐉘𐉙𐉚𐉛𐉜𐉝𐉞𐉟𐉠𐉡𐉢𐉣𐉤𐉥𐉦𐉧𐉨𐉩𐉪𐉫𐉬𐉭𐉮𐉯𐉰𐉱𐉲𐉳𐉴𐉵𐉶𐉷𐉸𐉹𐉺𐉻𐉼𐉽𐉾𐉿𐊀𐊁𐊂𐊃𐊄𐊅𐊆𐊇𐊈𐊉𐊊𐊋𐊌𐊍𐊎𐊏𐊐𐊑𐊒𐊓𐊔𐊕𐊖𐊗𐊘𐊙𐊚𐊛𐊜𐊝𐊞𐊟𐊠𐊡𐊢𐊣𐊤𐊥𐊦𐊧𐊨𐊩𐊪𐊫𐊬𐊭𐊮𐊯𐊰𐊱𐊲𐊳𐊴𐊵𐊶𐊷𐊸𐊹𐊺𐊻𐊼𐊽𐊾𐊿𐋀𐋁𐋂𐋃𐋄𐋅𐋆𐋇𐋈𐋉𐋊𐋋𐋌𐋍𐋎𐋏𐋐𐋑𐋒𐋓𐋔𐋕𐋖𐋗𐋘𐋙𐋚𐋛𐋜𐋝𐋞𐋟𐋠𐋡𐋢𐋣𐋤𐋥𐋦𐋧𐋨𐋩𐋪𐋫𐋬𐋭𐋮𐋯𐋰𐋱𐋲𐋳𐋴𐋵𐋶𐋷𐋸𐋹𐋺𐋻𐋼𐋽𐋾𐋿𐌀𐌁𐌂𐌃𐌄𐌅𐌆𐌇𐌈𐌉𐌊𐌋𐌌𐌍𐌎𐌏𐌐𐌑𐌒𐌓𐌔𐌕𐌖𐌗𐌘𐌙𐌚𐌛𐌜𐌝𐌞𐌟𐌠𐌡𐌢𐌣𐌤𐌥𐌦𐌧𐌨𐌩𐌪𐌫𐌬𐌭𐌮𐌯𐌰𐌱𐌲𐌳𐌴𐌵𐌶𐌷𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌻𐌼𐌽𐌾𐌿𐍀𐍁𐍂𐍃𐍄𐍅𐍆𐍇𐍈𐍉𐍊𐍋𐍌𐍍𐍎𐍏𐍐𐍑𐍒𐍓𐍔𐍕𐍖𐍗𐍘𐍙𐍚𐍛𐍜𐍝𐍞𐍟𐍠𐍡𐍢𐍣𐍤𐍥𐍦𐍧𐍨𐍩𐍪𐍫𐍬𐍭𐍮𐍯𐍰𐍱𐍲𐍳𐍴𐍵𐍶𐍷𐍸𐍹𐍺𐍻𐍼𐍽𐍾𐍿𐎀𐎁𐎂𐎃𐎄𐎅𐎆𐎇𐎈𐎉𐎊𐎋𐎌𐎍𐎎𐎏𐎐𐎑𐎒𐎓𐎔𐎕𐎖𐎗𐎘𐎙𐎚𐎛𐎜𐎝𐎞𐎟𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤𐎥𐎦𐎧𐎨𐎩𐎪𐎫𐎬𐎭𐎮𐎯𐎰𐎱𐎲𐎳𐎴𐎵𐎶𐎷𐎸𐎹𐎺𐎻𐎼𐎽𐎾𐎿𐏀𐏁𐏂𐏃𐏄𐏅𐏆𐏇𐏈𐏉𐏊𐏋𐏌𐏍𐏎𐏏𐏐𐏑𐏒𐏓𐏔𐏕𐏖𐏗𐏘𐏙𐏚𐏛𐏜𐏝𐏞𐏟𐏠𐏡𐏢𐏣𐏤𐏥𐏦𐏧𐏨𐏩𐏪𐏫𐏬𐏭𐏮𐏯𐏰𐏱𐏲𐏳𐏴𐏵𐏶𐏷𐏸𐏹𐏺𐏻𐏼𐏽𐏾𐏿𐐀𐐁𐐂𐐃𐐄𐐅𐐆𐐇𐐈𐐉𐐊𐐋𐐌𐐍𐐎𐐏𐐐𐐑𐐒𐐓𐐔𐐕𐐖𐐗𐐘𐐙𐐚𐐛𐐜𐐝𐐞𐐟𐐠𐐡𐐢𐐣𐐤𐐥𐐦𐐧𐐨𐐩𐐪𐐫𐐬𐐭𐐮𐐯𐐰𐐱𐐲𐐳𐐴𐐵𐐶𐐷𐐸𐐹

“ $\nabla \psi$ ,” came the curling, low reply. “ $\overline{\Phi} \subseteq \square \cap \delta \subseteq \square \psi \supseteq i \delta \text{ i } \Delta \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla \nabla$ .  
 $\Delta \neq \Delta \nabla \psi \wedge \overline{\Phi} \nabla \nabla \subseteq i \subseteq \cap \nabla \Delta \wedge \nabla \psi \overline{\Phi} \nabla \supseteq \Delta \supseteq i \nabla \nabla \psi \subseteq i \nabla$ .”

“George was his friend,” Dream defended without thought. He paused. The words were less his and more someone else’s. Sorrow buried deep in his code. “Do you know where he went?”

[illegible]

Silence fell over Dream, and for a moment he dared to hope and pray the celestial found happiness in his next world. With someone like George at his best. Thoughts of his former friend soured him further, and he found himself unable to think in the present. The past loomed too large and imposing.

A hiss crackled in the background. A forehead bonked against his. Blinking up, he met vivid red eyes.

“Dream. Listen to this well, because I’m only saying this once,” Techno said, breathing deep and regulated between words. A pattern Dream could not help but match. “When we get back, sleep with one eye open because I will get my revenge.”

A second passed, the words registered, and Dream’s lungs wheezed unable to hold back. Eventually, his wheezes petered out enough for him to squeeze out some semblance of a reply.

“Wha—What is wrong with you?”

“What can I say? It’s dishonorable to go after an opponent without warning,” Techno shrugged, backing up and giving Dream more room to breathe. “Though you brought this on yourself, so honestly I am just warning you out of the goodness of my heart.”

“That’s—you’re lying! You only want me to be overly paranoid until you feel I’ve suffered enough and then do whatever you’ve decided is fair in the worst way possible!”

“Aw. I’m touched,” Techno said, black, sharp fingers pressed dramatically against his ruffled shirt. “You know me so well.”

Dream bit back a curse and stuck his tongue out at his best friend. A snort pointedly called him childish, and so he repeated the gesture. He’d find a way to evade Techno’s revenge and foil the smug Piglin hybrid’s no doubt overly elaborate plan.

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“I hate you.”

“Hm? What’s that Dream? I can’t hear you over this passel of brutes. You’ll have to tell me what you said later.”

Dream tried to glare at the smug Piglin hybrid, but he couldn't even see him from where he was being smothered by various Piglin brutes that had decided to "help" Dream and Peace in understanding Piglin culture. Specifically, the customs involving jewelry.

*"What do you want to symbolize your puny passel?"* grunted the largest of the brutes loudly. His shoulders nudged at Techno's head. *"I think netherwart would be best choice."*

The sneer in the grunts had a scowl form on Techno's face.

*"My passel is worth more than netherwart,"* grunted Techno lowly and clearly.

*"Sure it is,"* snorted another brute, moving away from Dream and Peace to slap Techno hard on the back. *"I recognize the masked one. There are stories in the Waste Passels of him and how he is the reason so many of them survived. They also have named him passel-friend and wish for him to return to them for trades. They have much to offer him."*

Dream tried to keep from reacting to the words, unwilling to give these brutes more ammunition against him. They seemed to think that his inability to speak "proper Piglin" meant he did not understand them clearly. By Piglin standards, his ability to understand them would upgrade him from adorably clueless to cute try-hard. Or so he figured given the Waste Passel's past reactions. He—He would try to make time to see them soon.

Without Techno.

The snorting squeal and grunting entreaties settled down as many of the brutes' ears stood on end.

*"This is the masked one?"* lowly squealed one of the more decorated brutes. It peered at him closely. *"I thought he would be larger."*

*"Papa is very big!"* Peace squealed. *"Our passel is very strong!"*

*“Aw. Of course it is. To one so puny and small, all must look big,”* softly snorted the decorated brute, bending down to face Peace. *“Poor piglet. You will never grow to be strong.”*

Peace leapt out of Dream’s arms, pulled out a small sword, and proceeded to slash the brute’s face with. The brute let out a high-pitched squeal, and Dream snatched Peace back up in his arms, swung him over his shoulder and under his equipped shield, snorted at him to hang on, and pulled out his Nightmare ax. The injured brute squealed out a loud war cry.

The brutes around them broke out into loud, squealing, snorting guffaws.

*“Don’t underestimate a piglet’s loyalty to its passel,”* one of the brutes called out through the laughter.

*“Netherbrick should have known better,”* another agreed.

*“Brick thinks we’re dumb enough to fight with him against a passel caretaker,”* snorted and squealed another brute that was even more decorated than the injured one. *“Brick dumb.”*

*“We are sorry,”* said the largest of the brutes, sticking out his chest and crossing his arms. He nodded respectfully at Techno. *“Your passel is not netherwart. It is magma stone. We will make the curls of passel for you, half-hog.”*

*“No,”* snorted Techno firmly. *“But if you want to give us gold, we could use that to make it on our own.”*

*“Why would we want to ally ourselves with you, half-hog?”*

*“Because we are allies worth having,”* Dream snorted. He hefted his ax carefully over his shoulder, avoiding Peace. His attempts were foiled when the small Piglin clambered next to it

to glare at the largest brute.

A squealing coo sounded from Dream's right, but he ignored it. Techno took out the Orphan Obliterator and moved through the loose circle of brutes to stand next to Dream.

*"A half-hog, a squealing-piglet human, and a tiny half-squealing piglet,"* the largest brute grunted. He examined them with intense eyes. The brute snorted loudly and wordlessly. *"A block of gold."*

*"Two blocks of gold,"* Techno grunted. *"And all your nether crystal."*

The brute's white eyes glowed with lava orange, but then they closed.

*"An obsidian passel,"* the largest brute snorted amused. His tusks barred in his grin. *"Fine bargain. Come again with the rest of your passel, passel protector."*

*"I will,"* Techno agreed. *"We will need your help to curl one of us."*

"Curl?" Dream whispered as they walked away. The word had come up enough during the jewelry discussion, and he had to ask.

"See this?" Techno said. He shook his head and let his small emerald earring glitter from where it normally hid in his hair. "It's a passel curl. It indicates which particular passel you belong to. Phil and I had matching ones."

"And you plan to make ones for all of us?"

Techno shrugged and did not look him in the eye.

“It’ll make travel and trade in the Nether easier,” he said lowly.

“Passel curl?” Peace asked, climbing up to Dream’s head to peer up at Techno. “We match because we passel?”

“Kid, are you going to make me say it out loud?” Techno said with an eyeroll. He leant down and bopped Peace’s head with his own. “We passel. We match.”

Peace squealed in delight. Dream would have to struggle through making Bad sit through a piercing, but there was no going back now. Matching jewelry was a must when one was passel.

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“It’s not fair!”

The whine echoed through the dining room for the fiftieth time. Dream wondered if he could mute the sound without making Bad angry. He might miss muffins, but at this point the possible peace that silence would give him felt worth it.

“It’s not my fault my skin is made of diamond!” Skeppy whined. “I want passel jewelry too!”

“We could try a clasp,” Niki suggested, sending subtle plea at Dream to...what? Mute Skeppy? He was hoping Bad would get annoyed enough to ask Dream to do it, but if not, he was going to do it and take the consequences. Niki appeared to be on his side, so at least he would have access to carrot cake.

“The last clasp broke,” Skeppy half-sobbed.

“Maybe we can make one out of diamonds?” Ranboo asked from behind Dream. Why the tall teen was crouching to hide behind Dream was anyone’s guess. Dream fiddled with the code

around Ranboo to muffle the sound around the teen. The teen sagged but did not move.

“But then it won’t match yours!” Skeppy cried. Okay. One more word and Dream was muting him and missing out on muffins. Though seeing as Bad had his hands over Peace’s ears and kept flinching, maybe Dream would not face that terrible consequence. *(How strange, to have a consequence be terrible without it causing him lasting physical harm. But none of his would cause him harm, not if they could help it.)*

“F\*\*\*\*! Someone shut him the f\*\*\*\* up! I can’t take any more of the s\*\*\*\*!” Tommy screamed. Long fingers tangled themselves in the back of Dream’s green cloak. Dream reached into the code.

“Okay. I’m done,” Techno said, his voice so void of emotion that Dream froze. The Piglin hybrid strode past him, grabbed Skeppy by the shoulders, and slapped him upside the head. He then shook out his hand. “Ow.”

“My head’s made of diamond. What did you think would happen?” Skeppy asked. At a normal volume. Finally!

“That you would stop your incessant whining,” Techno replied, flexing his hand open and closed slowly. “Gold is fragile. More fragile than even iron. It can’t pierce your ear like it can the rest of us. That’s an immutable fact. So if you want a curl, you’re going to have to accept that yours cannot be an exact replica. Not that a different clasp would change the meaning or whatever. We’re still going to be stuck with you until the end of time either way.”

“Don’t you mean I’ll be stuck with you for all time?”

“...if I agree with that phrasing, will you stop the whining?”

“Yes.”

“Then sure. You’re stuck with us until the end of our time.”

“Can my clasp at least look cooler than yours?”

“...whatever gets you to shut up.”

“Shutting up!” Skeppy declared eagerly. He earned glares from every corner of the living room. He gave a lopsided, goofy grin that somehow had the entire room relaxing before pulling Techno outside, likely to Techno’s small smithy. Niki gave Dream a significant look and followed the two. Dream had forgotten over the years how annoying Uncle Skeppy could be.

Too bad they were all too fond of him to kick him out. *(They cared too much about each other to ever abandon even one of them.)*

“Й { 0xw?” Ender chittered, his head popping up besides Dream’s. Dream hissed quietly back.

“Ш 0x л 0Δ. йФ'U U лwqxw≠ ≡w ≡0xЙлϢ ΔЙФΞ ллΩUw {oW≠ Δx0ллл.”

“Δлл Δw ФΞ0л Ϣ ΞФ ФΞw Ω xwФЙл ΔΔ { U0л[],” Ender hissed. Fiddling the code around Ender back to normal, Dream chuckled.

“Hey! Whatever you said about me, take it back!” Tommy said, zooming over to them.

“Й ФΞ0л Ϣ ΞФ H0л лЙл л0Ф лwЙ Ϣ л Ф0 лллw≠ {ФΔлл 0лx UΔл Ϣ лΔ Ϣ w?”

“I still don’t understand that s\*\*\*\*, but I know what my name sounds like!”



“𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂?” Ender whooped in muffled surprise. “𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂?”

“There! That one!” Tommy said, pointing dramatically at Ender. “See? I don’t have to know your f\*\*\*\*\* language to know you’re talking about me!”

Dream’s wheezes sputtered out his lips without even a chance for him to stop them.

“Stop laughing!” Tommy commanded, hands on his hips and floating up to look down on Dream. “And make End-b\*\*\*\*\* stop talking about me in his s\*\*\*\*\* tongue!”

Lungs spasming, Dream lost his balance and fell onto the floor. He couldn’t—Tommy thought—Another round of laughing squeezed his stomach tight.

“Should we stop him?” asked Ranboo. He hovered closer to Dream’s fallen side. Tommy huffed out a snort that Dream barely heard.

“Let him die.”

“Is he all right?” Bad asked as he stepped up beside Ranboo.

“Ender called Tommy 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 and he lost it.”

“𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂?” Bad pronounced badly, making the breath Dream had gathered escape loudly. “What’s that?”

“Tommy’s name apparently,” Ranboo replied, and Dream’s stomach spasmed alongside his lungs. “Though given both Dream’s reaction and Ender’s, maybe it’s not?”

“Then what is it?” Bad asked, completely clueless. Dream couldn’t breathe!

“Papa okay?” came the small voice from Bad’s arms. Small white eyes met Dream’s, and Dream’s lungs and stomach steadied. Taking a long, slightly shuddery breath, Dream eased his wheezing and sat up straight. He cleared his throat.

“Sorry,” he said with only one crack. He coughed. “Tommy’s not wrong. That certainly is Ender’s name for him.”

“What the f\*\*—flip does that mean?”

“That Ender has a nickname for you like you have for Ranboo and him,” Dream said. He held out his arms and Peace pounced into his lap. Peace snuffled confused.

“Is Ω ƶ⊖⊘iλ mean name?”

“Not any more than Tommy’s names for him and Boo.”

“Ranboo likes my name for him! Right, Boob Boy?” Tommy insisted.

“Not really,” Ranboo said. “But it’s not like you’ve given me a choice.”

“Nickname’s aren’t supposed to be a choice! They’re supposed to fit dum—Boob boy.”

“In that case, Ω ƶ⊖⊘iλ fits you perfectly,” Dream said. The ghost’s face darkened into deep cerulean, and his cheeks puffed out as if he would begin to rage. Transparent blue eyes flicked down at Peace’s curious gaze, and Tommy deflated.

“I should at least know what the f\*—flipping name means!”

“Cretin?” Ranboo said with hint of confusion.

“Cretin! How f—flipping dare he!” Tommy cried. He growled and pulled at his hair. “AGH! You, me, outside, Boob Boy! I’m going to go mad if I have to keep from cursing you out because we’re in front of Dream’s brat!”

“I’m staying right here,” Ranboo said, sitting cross-legged beside Dream. “Besides Peace does not want me to leave.”

“Boo stay,” Peace said with a very solemn nod. Dream held back from tickling the small pilgin’s sides to break the adorably serious look. “Tommee stay too. We play!”

“Who said I wanted to play with you?” Tommy snapped. Wide small eyes blinked wetly up at him. “I mean—Dream doesn’t want you to play with a ‘cretin,’ does he?”

“You have no idea what that word means, do you?” Dream challenged.

“I have no f\*-flipping clue,” Tommy said without missing a beat.

“Don’t be silly, Tommy. I think we should make you Peace’s permanent babysitter,” Bad said. His mouth had stretched into his most wicked grin. “Peace is being such a good influence on you.”

“Peace is always good,” the small Piglin said brightly. “Peace likes Tommee. Tommee play with Peace?”

The ghost teen crossed his arms and looked over Dream’s head. “What game could we even play? Tag? Patty-cake? Go Fish?”

“Fish?” Peace asked, wrinkling his tiny snout. “I don’t want fish. Play Hide and Seek?”

“You know what? Fine. If Dream’s okay with you playing with a cretin, then let’s play Manhunt without the killing the dragon part. It’s what we’ve been doing for weeks.”

“I already told you, Tommy. When everything is settled here, I’ll ask Callahan to keep an eye on the world and take you to a Manhunt seed,” Dream sighed.

“Manhunt!” Peace cheered. “Watch Manhunt!”

“You want to watch Manhunt again?” Bad said indulgently. “Which one?”

“Four rematch!” Peace bubbled his reply. “Confidence!”

“Four Hunters Rematch it is,” Bad chuckled. He slowly reached out his hands, sending a question through void white eyes. Dream nodded and gently nudged Peace back into Bad’s arms. Bad scooped the small Piglin up and offered Dream a hand up. “Mini-muffins or tater tots.”

“Taters!” Peace immediately answered. Dream hated how Techno had corrupted his son, but there was nothing to be done about it now.

“We’re going to have to wait until Tech’s done with Skeppy,” said Dream. “But maybe Boo and Tommee will help set up a pillow fort for us to watch it from.”

“Tommee and Boo help!” Peace said. He reached out for the two. “Please!”

“I am regretting not going with the Hide and Seek option,” Tommy grumbled but let his fingers hover over small black ones. Ranboo chuckled and took the opposite small hand gingerly. The tall teen dipped into a silly bow.

“As the tiny prince commands.”

“Prince?! Don’t start with that! Then Dream’s going to get in his head to become king somehow!” Tommy protested.

“Why would I do that? And how far could I get before Techno overthrows me?” Dream said as the three walked over to the newest closet to gather pillows while Bad set up the recording to project on the blank wall in the “media” room.

“A week,” said Ranboo. “And that’s only if Techno’s still busy with the curl thing for Skeppy.”

“That’d be awesome to see! The Technoblade versus Manhunt Dream, Tyrant Takedown,” Tommy said too eagerly.

“No,” Dream said, his voice struggling to stay level. The thought of Techno— “Isn’t a Manhunt with you three and Techno against me not good enough?”

“It would be if you let us do real ones!” Tommy complained. “Chasing you down for thousands of blocks isn’t a real Manhunt!”

“Is that why I’ve won seven times?” Dream asked. “Because those weren’t ‘real Manhunts’?”

“Exactly,” Tommy said smugly.

“You do realize that it’s going to be harder to catch him in a real Manhunt if we don’t learn to keep up with his speed?” Ranboo pointed out.

“You need to learn how to better use your teleportation powers, Boob Boy.”

“Teleporting is cheating.”

“So’s floating, but I still do it,” Tommy said.

“You’re a ghost! It’s not like you can turn it off,” Ranboo countered, grabbing several pillows.

“Shows what you know, Boo. I can turn it off whenever I want to,” Tommy said, hovering a millimeter off the floor. Green and red eyes glanced down at Tommy’s feet.

“𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄𐀅𐀆𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗𐀘𐀙𐀚𐀛𐀜𐀝𐀞𐀟𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐁀𐁁𐁂𐁃𐁄𐁅𐁆𐁇𐁈𐁉𐁊𐁋𐁌𐁍𐁎𐁏𐁐𐁑𐁒𐁓𐁔𐁕𐁖𐁗𐁘𐁙𐁚𐁛𐁜𐁝𐁞𐁟𐁠𐁡𐁢𐁣𐁤𐁥𐁦𐁧𐁨𐁩𐁪𐁫𐁬𐁭𐁮𐁯𐁰𐁱𐁲𐁳𐁴𐁵𐁶𐁷𐁸𐁹𐁺𐁻𐁼𐁽𐁾𐁿𐂀𐂁𐂂𐂃𐂄𐂅𐂆𐂇𐂈𐂉𐂊𐂋𐂌𐂍𐂎𐂏𐂐𐂑𐂒𐂓𐂔𐂕𐂖𐂗𐂘𐂙𐂚𐂛𐂜𐂝𐂞𐂟𐂠𐂡𐂢𐂣𐂤𐂥𐂦𐂧𐂨𐂩𐂪𐂫𐂬𐂭𐂮𐂯𐂰𐂱𐂲𐂳𐂴𐂵𐂶𐂷𐂸𐂹𐂺𐂻𐂼𐂽𐂾𐂿𐃀𐃁𐃂𐃃𐃄𐃅𐃆𐃇𐃈𐃉𐃊𐃋𐃌𐃍𐃎𐃏𐃐𐃑𐃒𐃓𐃔𐃕𐃖𐃗𐃘𐃙𐃚𐃛𐃜𐃝𐃞𐃟𐃠𐃡𐃢𐃣𐃤𐃥𐃦𐃧𐃨𐃩𐃪𐃫𐃬𐃭𐃮𐃯𐃰𐃱𐃲𐃳𐃴𐃵𐃶𐃷𐃸𐃹𐃺𐃻𐃼𐃽𐃾𐃿𐄀𐄁𐄂𐄃𐄄𐄅𐄆𐄇𐄈𐄉𐄊𐄋𐄌𐄍𐄎𐄏𐄐𐄑𐄒𐄓𐄔𐄕𐄖𐄗𐄘𐄙𐄚𐄛𐄜𐄝𐄞𐄟𐄠𐄡𐄢𐄣𐄤𐄥𐄦𐄧𐄨𐄩𐄪𐄫𐄬𐄭𐄮𐄯𐄰𐄱𐄲𐄳𐄴𐄵𐄶𐄷𐄸𐄹𐄺𐄻𐄼𐄽𐄾𐄿𐅀𐅁𐅂𐅃𐅄𐅅𐅆𐅇𐅈𐅉𐅊𐅋𐅌𐅍𐅎𐅏𐅐𐅑𐅒𐅓𐅔𐅕𐅖𐅗𐅘𐅙𐅚𐅛𐅜𐅝𐅞𐅟𐅠𐅡𐅢𐅣𐅤𐅥𐅦𐅧𐅨𐅩𐅪𐅫𐅬𐅭𐅮𐅯𐅰𐅱𐅲𐅳𐅴𐅵𐅶𐅷𐅸𐅹𐅺𐅻𐅼𐅽𐅾𐅿𐆀𐆁𐆂𐆃𐆄𐆅𐆆𐆇𐆈𐆉𐆊𐆋𐆌𐆍𐆎𐆏𐆐𐆑𐆒𐆓𐆔𐆕𐆖𐆗𐆘𐆙𐆚𐆛𐆜𐆝𐆞𐆟𐆠𐆡𐆢𐆣𐆤𐆥𐆦𐆧𐆨𐆩𐆪𐆫𐆬𐆭𐆮𐆯𐆰𐆱𐆲𐆳𐆴𐆵𐆶𐆷𐆸𐆹𐆺𐆻𐆼𐆽𐆾𐆿𐇀𐇁𐇂𐇃𐇄𐇅𐇆𐇇𐇈𐇉𐇊𐇋𐇌𐇍𐇎𐇏𐇐𐇑𐇒𐇓𐇔𐇕𐇖𐇗𐇘𐇙𐇚𐇛𐇜𐇝𐇞𐇟𐇠𐇡𐇢𐇣𐇤𐇥𐇦𐇧𐇨𐇩𐇪𐇫𐇬𐇭𐇮𐇯𐇰𐇱𐇲𐇳𐇴𐇵𐇶𐇷𐇸𐇹𐇺𐇻𐇼𐇽𐇾𐇿𐈀𐈁𐈂𐈃𐈄𐈅𐈆𐈇𐈈𐈉𐈊𐈋𐈌𐈍𐈎𐈏𐈐𐈑𐈒𐈓𐈔𐈕𐈖𐈗𐈘𐈙𐈚𐈛𐈜𐈝𐈞𐈟𐈠𐈡𐈢𐈣𐈤𐈥𐈦𐈧𐈨𐈩𐈪𐈫𐈬𐈭𐈮𐈯𐈰𐈱𐈲𐈳𐈴𐈵𐈶𐈷𐈸𐈹𐈺𐈻𐈼𐈽𐈾𐈿𐉀𐉁𐉂𐉃𐉄𐉅𐉆𐉇𐉈𐉉𐉊𐉋𐉌𐉍𐉎𐉏𐉐𐉑𐉒𐉓𐉔𐉕𐉖𐉗𐉘𐉙𐉚𐉛𐉜𐉝𐉞𐉟𐉠𐉡𐉢𐉣𐉤𐉥𐉦𐉧𐉨𐉩𐉪𐉫𐉬𐉭𐉮𐉯𐉰𐉱𐉲𐉳𐉴𐉵𐉶𐉷𐉸𐉹𐉺𐉻𐉼𐉽𐉾𐉿𐊀𐊁𐊂𐊃𐊄𐊅𐊆𐊇𐊈𐊉𐊊𐊋𐊌𐊍𐊎𐊏𐊐𐊑𐊒𐊓𐊔𐊕𐊖𐊗𐊘𐊙𐊚𐊛𐊜𐊝𐊞𐊟𐊠𐊡𐊢𐊣𐊤𐊥𐊦𐊧𐊨𐊩𐊪𐊫𐊬𐊭𐊮𐊯𐊰𐊱𐊲𐊳𐊴𐊵𐊶𐊷𐊸𐊹𐊺𐊻𐊼𐊽𐊾𐊿𐋀𐋁𐋂𐋃𐋄𐋅𐋆𐋇𐋈𐋉𐋊𐋋𐋌𐋍𐋎𐋏𐋐𐋑𐋒𐋓𐋔𐋕𐋖𐋗𐋘𐋙𐋚𐋛𐋜𐋝𐋞𐋟𐋠𐋡𐋢𐋣𐋤𐋥𐋦𐋧𐋨𐋩𐋪𐋫𐋬𐋭𐋮𐋯𐋰𐋱𐋲𐋳𐋴𐋵𐋶𐋷𐋸𐋹𐋺𐋻𐋼𐋽𐋾𐋿𐌀𐌁𐌂𐌃𐌄𐌅𐌆𐌇𐌈𐌉𐌊𐌋𐌌𐌍𐌎𐌏𐌐𐌑𐌒𐌓𐌔𐌕𐌖𐌗𐌘𐌙𐌚𐌛𐌜𐌝𐌞𐌟𐌠𐌡𐌢𐌣𐌤𐌥𐌦𐌧𐌨𐌩𐌪𐌫𐌬𐌭𐌮𐌯𐌰𐌱𐌲𐌳𐌴𐌵𐌶𐌷𐌸𐌹𐌺𐌻𐌼𐌽𐌾𐌿𐍀𐍁𐍂𐍃𐍄𐍅𐍆𐍇𐍈𐍉𐍊𐍋𐍌𐍍𐍎𐍏𐍐𐍑𐍒𐍓𐍔𐍕𐍖𐍗𐍘𐍙𐍚𐍛𐍜𐍝𐍞𐍟𐍠𐍡𐍢𐍣𐍤𐍥𐍦𐍧𐍨𐍩𐍪𐍫𐍬𐍭𐍮𐍯𐍰𐍱𐍲𐍳𐍴𐍵𐍶𐍷𐍸𐍹𐍺𐍻𐍼𐍽𐍾𐍿𐎀𐎁𐎂𐎃𐎄𐎅𐎆𐎇𐎈𐎉𐎊𐎋𐎌𐎍𐎎𐎏𐎐𐎑𐎒𐎓𐎔𐎕𐎖𐎗𐎘𐎙𐎚𐎛𐎜𐎝𐎞𐎟𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣𐎤𐎥𐎦𐎧𐎨𐎩𐎪𐎫𐎬𐎭𐎮𐎯𐎰𐎱𐎲𐎳𐎴𐎵𐎶𐎷𐎸𐎹𐎺𐎻𐎼𐎽𐎾𐎿𐏀𐏁𐏂𐏃𐏄𐏅𐏆𐏇𐏈𐏉𐏊𐏋𐏌𐏍𐏎𐏏𐏐𐏑𐏒𐏓𐏔𐏕𐏖𐏗𐏘𐏙𐏚𐏛𐏜𐏝𐏞𐏟𐏠𐏡𐏢𐏣𐏤𐏥𐏦𐏧𐏨𐏩𐏪𐏫𐏬𐏭𐏮𐏯𐏰𐏱𐏲𐏳𐏴𐏵𐏶𐏷𐏸𐏹𐏺𐏻𐏼𐏽𐏾𐏿𐐀𐐁𐐂𐐃𐐄𐐅𐐆𐐇𐐈𐐉𐐊𐐋𐐌𐐍𐐎𐐏𐐐𐐑𐐒𐐓𐐔𐐕𐐖𐐗𐐘𐐙𐐚𐐛𐐜𐐝𐐞𐐟𐐠𐐡𐐢𐐣𐐤𐐥𐐦𐐧𐐨𐐩𐐪𐐫𐐬𐐭𐐮𐐯𐐰𐐱𐐲𐐳𐐴𐐵𐐶𐐷𐐸𐐹𐐺𐐻𐐼𐐽𐐾𐐿𐑀𐑁𐑂𐑃𐑄𐑅𐑆𐑇𐑈𐑉𐑊𐑋𐑌𐑍𐑎𐑏𐑐𐑑𐑒𐑓𐑔𐑕𐑖𐑗𐑘𐑙𐑚𐑛𐑜𐑝𐑞𐑟𐑠𐑡𐑢𐑣𐑤𐑥𐑦𐑧𐑨𐑩𐑪𐑫𐑬𐑭𐑮𐑯𐑰𐑱𐑲𐑳𐑴𐑵𐑶𐑷𐑸𐑹𐑺𐑻𐑼𐑽𐑾𐑿𐒀𐒁𐒂𐒃𐒄𐒅𐒆𐒇𐒈𐒉𐒊𐒋𐒌𐒍𐒎𐒏𐒐𐒑𐒒𐒓𐒔𐒕𐒖𐒗𐒘𐒙𐒚𐒛𐒜𐒝𐒞𐒟𐒠𐒡𐒢𐒣𐒤𐒥𐒦𐒧𐒨𐒩𐒪𐒫𐒬𐒭𐒮𐒯𐒰𐒱𐒲𐒳𐒴𐒵𐒶𐒷𐒸𐒹𐒺𐒻𐒼𐒽𐒾𐒿𐓀𐓁𐓂𐓃𐓄𐓅𐓆𐓇𐓈𐓉𐓊𐓋𐓌𐓍𐓎𐓏𐓐𐓑𐓒𐓓𐓔𐓕𐓖𐓗𐓘𐓙𐓚𐓛𐓜𐓝𐓞𐓟𐓠𐓡𐓢𐓣𐓤𐓥𐓦𐓧𐓨𐓩𐓪𐓫𐓬𐓭𐓮𐓯𐓰𐓱𐓲𐓳𐓴𐓵𐓶𐓷𐓸𐓹𐓺𐓻𐓼𐓽𐓾𐓿𐔀𐔁𐔂𐔃𐔄𐔅𐔆𐔇𐔈𐔉𐔊𐔋𐔌𐔍𐔎𐔏𐔐𐔑𐔒𐔓𐔔𐔕𐔖𐔗𐔘𐔙𐔚𐔛𐔜𐔝𐔞𐔟𐔠𐔡𐔢𐔣𐔤𐔥𐔦𐔧𐔨𐔩𐔪𐔫𐔬𐔭𐔮𐔯𐔰𐔱𐔲𐔳𐔴𐔵𐔶𐔷𐔸𐔹𐔺𐔻𐔼𐔽𐔾𐔿𐕀𐕁𐕂𐕃𐕄𐕅𐕆𐕇𐕈𐕉𐕊𐕋𐕌𐕍𐕎𐕏𐕐𐕑𐕒𐕓𐕔𐕕𐕖𐕗𐕘𐕙𐕚𐕛𐕜𐕝𐕞𐕟𐕠𐕡𐕢𐕣𐕤𐕥𐕦𐕧𐕨𐕩𐕪𐕫𐕬𐕭𐕮𐕯𐕰𐕱𐕲𐕳𐕴𐕵𐕶𐕷𐕸𐕹𐕺𐕻𐕼𐕽𐕾𐕿𐖀𐖁𐖂𐖃𐖄𐖅𐖆𐖇𐖈𐖉𐖊𐖋𐖌𐖍𐖎𐖏𐖐𐖑𐖒𐖓𐖔𐖕𐖖𐖗𐖘𐖙𐖚𐖛𐖜𐖝𐖞𐖟𐖠𐖡𐖢𐖣𐖤𐖥𐖦𐖧𐖨𐖩𐖪𐖫𐖬𐖭𐖮𐖯𐖰𐖱𐖲𐖳𐖴𐖵𐖶𐖷𐖸𐖹𐖺𐖻𐖼𐖽𐖾𐖿𐗀𐗁𐗂𐗃𐗄𐗅𐗆𐗇𐗈𐗉𐗊𐗋𐗌𐗍𐗎𐗏𐗐𐗑𐗒𐗓𐗔𐗕𐗖𐗗𐗘𐗙𐗚𐗛𐗜𐗝𐗞𐗟𐗠𐗡𐗢𐗣𐗤𐗥𐗦𐗧𐗨𐗩𐗪𐗫𐗬𐗭𐗮𐗯𐗰𐗱𐗲𐗳𐗴𐗵𐗶𐗷𐗸𐗹𐗺𐗻𐗼𐗽𐗾𐗿𐘀𐘁𐘂𐘃𐘄𐘅𐘆𐘇𐘈𐘉𐘊𐘋𐘌𐘍𐘎𐘏𐘐𐘑𐘒𐘓𐘔𐘕𐘖𐘗𐘘𐘙𐘚𐘛𐘜𐘝𐘞𐘟𐘠𐘡𐘢𐘣𐘤𐘥𐘦𐘧𐘨𐘩𐘪𐘫𐘬𐘭𐘮𐘯𐘰𐘱𐘲𐘳𐘴𐘵𐘶𐘷𐘸𐘹𐘺𐘻𐘼𐘽𐘾𐘿𐙀𐙁𐙂𐙃𐙄𐙅𐙆𐙇𐙈𐙉𐙊𐙋𐙌𐙍𐙎𐙏𐙐𐙑𐙒𐙓𐙔𐙕𐙖𐙗𐙘𐙙𐙚𐙛𐙜𐙝𐙞𐙟𐙠𐙡𐙢𐙣𐙤𐙥𐙦𐙧𐙨𐙩𐙪𐙫𐙬𐙭𐙮𐙯𐙰𐙱𐙲𐙳𐙴𐙵𐙶𐙷𐙸𐙹𐙺𐙻𐙼𐙽𐙾𐙿𐚀𐚁𐚂𐚃𐚄𐚅𐚆𐚇𐚈𐚉𐚊𐚋𐚌𐚍𐚎𐚏𐚐𐚑𐚒𐚓𐚔𐚕𐚖𐚗𐚘𐚙𐚚𐚛𐚜𐚝𐚞𐚟𐚠𐚡𐚢𐚣𐚤𐚥𐚦𐚧𐚨𐚩𐚪𐚫𐚬𐚭𐚮𐚯𐚰𐚱𐚲𐚳𐚴𐚵𐚶𐚷𐚸𐚹𐚺𐚻𐚼𐚽𐚾𐚿𐛀𐛁𐛂𐛃𐛄𐛅𐛆𐛇𐛈𐛉𐛊𐛋𐛌𐛍𐛎𐛏𐛐𐛑𐛒𐛓𐛔𐛕𐛖𐛗𐛘𐛙𐛚𐛛𐛜𐛝𐛞𐛟𐛠𐛡𐛢𐛣𐛤𐛥𐛦𐛧𐛨𐛩𐛪𐛫𐛬𐛭𐛮𐛯𐛰𐛱𐛲𐛳𐛴𐛵𐛶𐛷𐛸𐛹𐛺𐛻𐛼𐛽𐛾𐛿𐜀𐜁𐜂𐜃𐜄𐜅𐜆𐜇𐜈𐜉𐜊𐜋𐜌𐜍𐜎𐜏𐜐𐜑𐜒𐜓𐜔𐜕𐜖𐜗𐜘𐜙𐜚𐜛𐜜𐜝𐜞𐜟𐜠𐜡𐜢𐜣𐜤𐜥𐜦𐜧𐜨𐜩𐜪𐜫𐜬𐜭𐜮𐜯𐜰𐜱𐜲𐜳𐜴𐜵𐜶𐜷𐜸𐜹𐜺𐜻𐜼𐜽𐜾𐜿𐝀𐝁𐝂𐝃𐝄𐝅𐝆𐝇𐝈𐝉𐝊𐝋𐝌𐝍𐝎𐝏𐝐𐝑𐝒𐝓𐝔𐝕𐝖𐝗𐝘𐝙𐝚𐝛𐝜𐝝𐝞𐝟𐝠𐝡𐝢𐝣𐝤𐝥𐝦𐝧𐝨𐝩𐝪𐝫𐝬𐝭𐝮𐝯𐝰𐝱𐝲𐝳𐝴𐝵𐝶𐝷𐝸𐝹𐝺𐝻𐝼𐝽𐝾𐝿𐞀𐞁𐞂𐞃𐞄𐞅𐞆𐞇𐞈𐞉𐞊𐞋𐞌𐞍𐞎𐞏𐞐𐞑𐞒𐞓𐞔𐞕𐞖𐞗𐞘𐞙𐞚𐞛𐞜𐞝𐞞𐞟𐞠𐞡𐞢𐞣𐞤𐞥𐞦𐞧𐞨𐞩𐞪𐞫𐞬𐞭𐞮𐞯𐞰𐞱𐞲𐞳𐞴𐞵𐞶𐞷𐞸𐞹𐞺𐞻𐞼𐞽𐞾𐞿𐟀𐟁𐟂𐟃𐟄𐟅𐟆𐟇𐟈𐟉𐟊𐟋𐟌𐟍𐟎𐟏𐟐𐟑𐟒𐟓𐟔𐟕𐟖𐟗𐟘𐟙𐟚𐟛𐟜𐟝𐟞𐟟𐟠𐟡𐟢𐟣𐟤𐟥𐟦𐟧𐟨𐟩𐟪𐟫𐟬𐟭𐟮𐟯𐟰𐟱𐟲𐟳𐟴𐟵𐟶𐟷𐟸𐟹𐟺𐟻𐟼𐟽𐟾𐟿𐠀𐠁𐠂𐠃𐠄𐠅𐠆𐠇𐠈𐠉𐠊𐠋𐠌𐠍𐠎𐠏𐠐𐠑𐠒𐠓𐠔𐠕𐠖𐠗𐠘𐠙𐠚𐠛𐠜𐠝𐠞𐠟𐠠𐠡𐠢𐠣𐠤𐠥𐠦𐠧𐠨𐠩𐠪𐠫𐠬𐠭𐠮𐠯𐠰𐠱𐠲𐠳𐠴𐠵𐠶𐠷𐠸𐠹𐠺𐠻𐠼𐠽𐠾𐠿𐡀𐡁𐡂𐡃𐡄𐡅𐡆𐡇𐡈𐡉𐡊𐡋𐡌𐡍𐡎𐡏𐡐𐡑𐡒𐡓𐡔𐡕𐡖𐡗𐡘𐡙𐡚𐡛𐡜𐡝𐡞𐡟𐡠𐡡𐡢𐡣𐡤𐡥𐡦𐡧𐡨𐡩𐡪𐡫𐡬𐡭𐡮𐡯𐡰𐡱𐡲𐡳𐡴𐡵𐡶𐡷𐡸𐡹𐡺𐡻𐡼𐡽𐡾𐡿𐢀𐢁𐢂𐢃𐢄𐢅𐢆𐢇𐢈𐢉𐢊𐢋𐢌𐢍𐢎𐢏𐢐𐢑𐢒𐢓𐢔𐢕𐢖𐢗𐢘𐢙𐢚𐢛𐢜𐢝𐢞𐢟𐢠𐢡𐢢𐢣𐢤𐢥𐢦𐢧𐢨𐢩𐢪𐢫𐢬𐢭𐢮𐢯𐢰𐢱𐢲𐢳𐢴𐢵𐢶𐢷𐢸𐢹𐢺𐢻𐢼𐢽𐢾𐢿𐣀𐣁𐣂𐣃𐣄𐣅𐣆𐣇𐣈𐣉𐣊𐣋𐣌𐣍𐣎𐣏𐣐𐣑𐣒𐣓𐣔𐣕𐣖𐣗𐣘𐣙𐣚𐣛𐣜𐣝𐣞𐣟𐣠𐣡𐣢𐣣𐣤𐣥𐣦𐣧𐣨𐣩𐣪𐣫𐣬𐣭𐣮𐣯𐣰𐣱𐣲𐣳𐣴𐣵𐣶𐣷𐣸𐣹𐣺𐣻𐣼𐣽𐣾𐣿𐤀𐤁𐤂𐤃𐤄𐤅𐤆𐤇𐤈𐤉𐤊𐤋𐤌𐤍𐤎𐤏𐤐𐤑𐤒𐤓𐤔𐤕𐤖𐤗𐤘𐤙𐤚𐤛𐤜𐤝𐤞𐤟𐤠𐤡𐤢𐤣𐤤𐤥𐤦𐤧𐤨𐤩𐤪𐤫𐤬𐤭𐤮𐤯𐤰𐤱𐤲𐤳𐤴𐤵𐤶𐤷𐤸𐤹𐤺𐤻𐤼𐤽𐤾𐤿𐥀𐥁𐥂𐥃𐥄𐥅𐥆𐥇𐥈𐥉𐥊𐥋𐥌𐥍𐥎𐥏𐥐𐥑𐥒𐥓𐥔𐥕𐥖𐥗𐥘𐥙𐥚𐥛𐥜𐥝𐥞𐥟𐥠𐥡𐥢𐥣𐥤𐥥𐥦𐥧𐥨𐥩𐥪𐥫𐥬𐥭𐥮𐥯𐥰𐥱𐥲𐥳𐥴𐥵𐥶𐥷𐥸𐥹𐥺𐥻𐥼𐥽𐥾𐥿𐦀𐦁𐦂𐦃𐦄𐦅𐦆𐦇𐦈𐦉𐦊𐦋𐦌𐦍𐦎𐦏𐦐𐦑𐦒𐦓𐦔𐦕𐦖𐦗𐦘𐦙𐦚𐦛𐦜𐦝𐦞𐦟𐦠𐦡𐦢𐦣𐦤𐦥𐦦𐦧𐦨𐦩𐦪𐦫𐦬𐦭𐦮𐦯𐦰𐦱𐦲𐦳𐦴𐦵𐦶𐦷𐦸𐦹𐦺𐦻𐦼𐦽𐦾𐦿𐧀𐧁𐧂𐧃𐧄𐧅𐧆𐧇𐧈𐧉𐧊𐧋𐧌𐧍𐧎𐧏𐧐𐧑𐧒𐧓𐧔𐧕𐧖𐧗𐧘𐧙𐧚𐧛𐧜𐧝𐧞𐧟𐧠𐧡𐧢𐧣𐧤𐧥𐧦𐧧𐧨𐧩𐧪𐧫𐧬𐧭𐧮𐧯𐧰𐧱𐧲𐧳𐧴𐧵𐧶𐧷𐧸𐧹𐧺𐧻𐧼𐧽𐧾𐧿𐨀𐨁𐨂𐨃𐨄𐨅𐨆𐨇𐨈𐨉𐨊𐨋𐨌𐨍𐨎𐨏𐨐𐨑𐨒𐨓𐨔𐨕𐨖𐨗𐨘𐨙𐨚𐨛𐨜𐨝𐨞𐨟𐨠𐨡𐨢𐨣𐨤𐨥𐨦𐨧𐨨𐨩𐨪𐨫𐨬𐨭𐨮𐨯𐨰𐨱𐨲𐨳𐨴𐨵𐨶𐨷𐨹𐨺𐨸𐨻𐨼𐨽𐨾𐨿𐩀𐩁𐩂𐩃𐩄𐩅𐩆𐩇𐩈𐩉𐩊𐩋𐩌𐩍𐩎𐩏𐩐𐩑𐩒𐩓𐩔𐩕𐩖𐩗𐩘𐩙𐩚𐩛𐩜𐩝𐩞𐩟𐩠𐩡𐩢𐩣𐩤𐩥𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩𐩪𐩫𐩬𐩭𐩮𐩯𐩰𐩱𐩲𐩳𐩴𐩵𐩶𐩷𐩸𐩹𐩺𐩻𐩼𐩽𐩾𐩿𐪀𐪁𐪂𐪃𐪄𐪅𐪆𐪇𐪈𐪉𐪊𐪋𐪌𐪍𐪎𐪏𐪐𐪑𐪒𐪓𐪔𐪕𐪖𐪗𐪘𐪙𐪚𐪛𐪜𐪝𐪞𐪟𐪠𐪡𐪢𐪣𐪤𐪥𐪦𐪧𐪨𐪩𐪪𐪫𐪬𐪭𐪮𐪯𐪰𐪱𐪲𐪳𐪴𐪵𐪶𐪷𐪸𐪹𐪺𐪻𐪼𐪽𐪾𐪿𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆𐫇𐫈𐫉𐫊𐫋𐫌𐫍𐫎𐫏𐫐𐫑𐫒𐫓𐫔𐫕𐫖𐫗𐫘𐫙𐫚𐫛𐫜𐫝𐫞𐫟𐫠𐫡𐫢𐫣𐫤𐫦𐫥𐫧𐫨𐫩𐫪𐫫𐫬𐫭𐫮𐫯𐫰𐫱𐫲𐫳𐫴𐫵𐫶𐫷𐫸𐫹𐫺𐫻𐫼𐫽𐫾𐫿𐬀𐬁𐬂𐬃𐬄𐬅𐬆𐬇𐬈𐬉𐬊𐬋𐬌𐬍𐬎𐬏𐬐𐬑𐬒𐬓𐬔𐬕𐬖𐬗𐬘𐬙𐬚𐬛𐬜𐬝𐬞𐬟𐬠𐬡𐬢𐬣𐬤𐬥𐬦𐬧𐬨𐬩𐬪𐬫𐬬𐬭𐬮𐬯𐬰𐬱𐬲𐬳𐬴𐬵𐬶𐬷𐬸𐬹𐬺𐬻𐬼𐬽𐬾𐬿𐭀𐭁𐭂𐭃𐭄𐭅𐭆𐭇𐭈𐭉𐭊𐭋𐭌𐭍𐭎𐭏𐭐𐭑𐭒𐭓𐭔𐭕𐭖𐭗𐭘𐭙𐭚𐭛𐭜𐭝𐭞𐭟𐭠𐭡𐭢𐭣𐭤𐭥𐭦𐭧𐭨𐭩𐭪𐭫𐭬𐭭𐭮𐭯𐭰𐭱𐭲𐭳𐭴𐭵𐭶𐭷𐭸𐭹𐭺𐭻𐭼𐭽𐭾𐭿𐮀𐮁𐮂𐮃𐮄𐮅𐮆𐮇𐮈𐮉𐮊𐮋𐮌𐮍𐮎𐮏𐮐𐮑𐮒𐮓𐮔𐮕𐮖𐮗𐮘𐮙𐮚𐮛𐮜𐮝𐮞𐮟𐮠𐮡𐮢𐮣𐮤𐮥𐮦𐮧𐮨𐮩𐮪𐮫𐮬𐮭𐮮𐮯𐮰𐮱𐮲𐮳𐮴𐮵𐮶𐮷𐮸𐮹𐮺𐮻𐮼𐮽𐮾𐮿𐯀𐯁𐯂𐯃𐯄𐯅𐯆𐯇𐯈𐯉𐯊𐯋𐯌𐯍𐯎𐯏𐯐𐯑𐯒𐯓𐯔𐯕𐯖𐯗𐯘𐯙𐯚

“Free for all!” Dream cried, shooting two pillows at once. One at Ender and another Bad. The first hit Ranboo who blinked and grabbed a fallen pillow to use as defense, while Bad dodged the one thrown at him and tossed his own at Dream.

Pillows continued to fly in the air in every direction, and shouts and cries filled the space.

Skeppy stood in the doorway and watched his best friend laugh as the small Piglin pounded him with a large green pillow. His diamond skin glittered brightly. A newly forged golden chain hung from a netherite clasp attached to a diamond ear and caught the glittering light. Letting out a fake battle cry, Skeppy joined the fray, picking up the small Piglin and whirling him around before dropping him in a loose pile of pillows.

“You dared to start without me?!” Skeppy said as seriously as he could. “Now you will pay! Get ready to have this fight reach another level!”

Several pillows hit him at once, and Skeppy laughed, taking the ammo thrown at him and redirecting it back at everyone else. Techno used Skeppy’s declaration as a distraction and got some well-placed hits in before a small white pillow hit his neck. The small Piglin that had launched the puffy projectile squealed and ran behind his dad to avoid retribution. It almost worked.

Chaos ensued. Half an hour later, pillows and people lay strewn on the floor. They were all out of breath and grinning from ear to ear.

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The darkness around him suffocated him. Dream kept pushing past the weighted cold black and towards the small light in the endless void. A figure stepped between him and the small light, and Dream halted his push forward.

“It’s nice to see you again, mate.”

“Philza Minecraft,” Dream said plainly. He wished he had his mask on, but he could not wear it in limbo. People’s limbo’s rarely allowed for secrets. They were meant to be pointedly honest. “Techno appreciated your last visit.”

“I appreciated the chance to visit him,” the taller man said with a fond smile. “I’ll probably take this chance to visit him again. Though considering how peaceful your world has become, I don’t think I’ll have another reason to visit for a long while.”

“Do you need a reason?” asked Dream. He mentally went over possibilities. Even now, using the—the book made his whole body shake or freeze most of the time. But he had once used it over and over again with—with Punz. And he did not have to use it himself. Teaching Techno couldn’t be too difficult.

“Don’t worry about it. Kristin and I are working on that,” Phil said, his hand waving dismissively. “How have you been, mate?”

“Fine,” Dream said quickly. He was. He had been. This particular situation was not ideal, but Niki had made brownies for when he finished. And Bad had promised rabbit stew and muffins for the rest of the week if he wanted. As long as he had them, all of them, he was fine. Especially since Tommy would finally stop sneaking into his room after dark to get the human touch the stubborn brat refused to admit he needed. *(That was a lie. The brat would still do that, but at least he would have to open doors to get in.)*

Blue eyes examined him skeptically, but Phil cleared his throat and kept going. “I owe you an apology.”

Dream stilled and forced his expression to stay blank. He really wished he had been able to bring his mask.

“I tried to talk about it with Techno,” Phil said. “To leave a letter with him to give to you. But he insisted I needed to talk to you face to face. Something about how you wouldn’t believe me unless I personally talked to you. Though he also said you might not believe me even then.”



Burning rasped through Dream's lung. He had come for one thing: to free Tommy's essence from this place. But Phil stood between him and the glowing golden light.

Dream focused on the people waiting for him. How thrilled Bad would be to finally hug Tommy and then smack him on the head every time the brat cursed. How Niki would insist on holding Tommy's hand and how Tommy would whine and complain but not let go. How Ranboo will finally get into a physical tussle with Tommy after Tommy would forget he is no longer untouchable and provoke the taller teen. How Techno would ambush the brat with one of his skull-cracking headbutts. How Skeppy would pretend once or twice to forget Tommy's solid and crash right into the brat on purpose. How Ender would enjoy watching Tommy tripping and forgetting about gravity but still let Ranboo help the brat up.

How Tommy would find reasons to hug Dream other than that he's only solid while Dream touches him.

Taking a breath, Dream faced Phil.

"It's okay," Dream breathed. "You only did what you thought was right to protect those you cared about."

"Mate," Phil groaned. "You did the same. Except that your attempts to protect your loved one did not include attacks on a literal child." The Angel of Death paused. "Or rather not one that hadn't provoked you first. Kristin had a short conversation with your former celestial guardian to check on him. She used the dreamscape that certain celestials can access since he's, you know, in an unconscious restorative state. He'll be fine in a century or so, by the way. So Kristin asked him about your world, and they had a long conversation. Like really long. She was gone for a full week. Apparently XD had a lot of questions about how mortal relationships work, and since Kristin has me, he thought she was a good person to ask."

"George misses him," Dream said abruptly, surprising even himself with the words. "He did not understand that XD giving me the borrowed code meant him leaving the server forever."

"I'm sure he didn't," Phil said. "But he seems to be the sort to hurt people without realizing the ramifications."

Dream did not respond to the pointed statement.

“Time in this space is different from outside it, but I’m sure you want to get back to the others,” Phil continued. “But I can’t let you leave without saying two things.”

Dream breathed.

“One: I apologize for my actions after you gave us refuge. I shouldn’t have gone after your kid. For the record, Techno chewed me out for that afterwards. He gave me a whole lecture on how Piglin passels work and what I would have invoked if I ever threatened a piglet under a passel caretaker’s aegis, in detail, while cutting down every red vine in sight *viciously* . Don’t let him make you think he agreed with me about threatening your kid. He didn’t.”

An unknown weight in Dream’s chest lightened.

“Second: Thank you.”

Several seconds passed as Dream stared at the Angel of Death uncomprehendingly. The man annoyingly chuckled.

“You’ve gone above and beyond to help the ones I placed in danger in an attempt to ‘help’ them. Even when you put up a front of disliking and mistrusting us, you protected us from the Egg. From the danger you saw from Tommy, which given whatever happened in the other timeline was real to you. And now you’ve done everything to fix your mistake with Tommy. That’s admirable, mate, and you deserve to know that.”

“You’re...welcome?” Dream said slowly. Warily. The Angel of Death had said what he wanted to say, so hopefully he would leave now. But the man did not.

“Can I—this sounds so weird—but can I headbutt you, mate?”

“What?” Dream said befuddled. Why did the man not *leave* ?

“It’s just—any passel of Techno’s is passel of mine. And so I was hoping—it’s strange I know, but it wouldn’t feel right to leave without one at this point. Promise it won’t hurt as much as Techno’s.”

Dream’s lungs had stopped again. He took a second and breathed. Deep and rhythmic like both Bad and Niki had insisted. As if he did not naturally know how to calm himself.  
(*Because they cared.*)

Techno cared for Phil. And Phil cared for Techno. But—Phil had asked. And he could not blame the Angel of Death for his reaction to Tommy’s death. To the threat Dream posed. He was making amends. But—but he had hurt Peace. He had hurt *Dream* .

And Dream had hurt him. Had banished him. Gotten him infected by the Egg. *Killed him* .

The Angel of Death had almost gotten them all killed.

Dream stuck out his hand. “Handshake?”

Ice blue eyes landed on Dream’s outstretched hand, the Angel of Death sighed.

“Fair, mate,” Phil said, quirk in his tone and on his lips. He gripped Dream’s hand firmly but not tightly. The other hand settled on Dream’s shoulder, unsettling the Admin. “You’re a good kid. And you’re a great Admin now that you have support. Just know that I’m part of that support whenever you need, yeah?”

“Thanks,” Dream dragged out of his suddenly thick throat. The hands let go.

“Kristin and I have a plan on how I can sneak over to visit, so I’ll be around. Unless you’d rather I not?”

Dream shook his head. He could not do that to Techno. If Techno had broken his access to Bad, Dream would have never forgiven the dumb pig.

“Thanks. Again,” Phil said happily. “I’ll get out of your hair, then.”

Dark wings flapped, and the Angel of Death was gone. Not attempting to find out where he had gone (and give the ancient Admin a chance to return), Dream cupped his hands around the golden light. His shoulders untensed, his lips curved upwards. Of course, the bratty gremlin has a golden essence. Too bad he hides it so well.

Cradling the golden light, Dream turned to walk back through the void. The golden essence reverberated with his own and made the journey light and warm.

---

Tubbo yawned and wobbled out of his tent. Rubbing his eye, he maneuvered over to the wooden bee hives. As he got close, he heard his bees buzzing in irritation. Like they did when someone other than Tubbo went to harvest honey. Snapping his iron armor into place, Tubbo equipped his sword and ran over to defend his bees. A familiar stream of expletives knocked him out of combat mode.

A head of blond hair poked out over one of the rows of beehives along with white sleeved arms. A hand poking out of a long white sleeve batted at the bees hard enough to push them away but gentle enough not hurt any. A motion long practiced from spending entirely too long in similar bee farms.

The sword fully dropped from Tubbo’s shaking hands.

“Tommy?”

The flailing arms jerked but kept pushing away bees as they headed around the large row of hives. Tubbo watched completely still as the blond head came fully into view followed by the red decorating the shoulders of the white sleeves. The lanky figure of Tubbo's best friend extracted the jeans and red sneakers from the bees territory, and Tubbo's bees buzzed off.

"Don't f\*\*\*\*\* get the wrong idea," Tommy said, arms crossed and scowling. "I'm only here because Niki needs some honey for a recipe she wanted to try for her shop in Kinoko and Tech can't seem to do s\*\*\*\*\* with bees. Can get a huge polar bear to roll over and play f\*\*\*\*\* dead, but bees are too much for him. Dream probably could since he's basically a f\*\*\*\*\* Disney princess, but he doesn't keep animals because of—because he's a p\*\*\*\*\*. Scared they'll die or s\*\*\*\*\*. Besides bees are your thing. They act like you're their f\*\*\*\*\* queen, so if anyone has good honey, it'd be you."

"Toms?" Tubbo repeated. His lips were trembling, and his vision blurred. "Are you—you solid?"

"If you mean, am I ghost anymore? F\*\*\*\*\* no. This really weird-a\*\*\*\*\* thing happened, and I stopped being a ghost. Don't ask me f\*\*\*\*\* how, because I have no f\*\*\*\*\* idea. I can still do some ghost things, but gravity's back to being a b\*\*\*\*\*. Super f\*\*\*\*\* annoying if you ask m—" A burst of air grunted beside Tubbo's ear as he hugged the living breath out of his best friend.

"You're okay," Tubbo sobbed. He couldn't see anything past his tears and white and red cloth. "You're *okay*."

"Come on, Tubs. Stop acting like such a f\*\*\*\*\* baby," Tommy said over Tubbo's shoulder. Lanky arms looped and tightened around Tubbo's back. Tubbo's shirt became wet, and Tommy continued unsteadily, "We're big men. And big men don't cry."

"Sure, Toms," Tubbo whispered hoarsely, bunching his fingers into the white shirt in order to make sure this moment was real. "Whatever you say, boss man."

---

The timer counted down large numbers on the screen in front of Sapnap. The couch dipped and bounced. Brown hair tickled his chin and ear as a large familiar head settled onto his shoulder.

“George, get off,” Sapnap grouched. He didn’t push George off, but he thought about it. (It had been so long since George had existed nearby long enough to annoy him.)

“No,” George answered, slumping more of his weight on Sapnap. Grumbling to at least complain about the inconvenience, Sapnap returned his attention to the screen. “Are you sure you want to watch it?”

“No,” Sapnap said flatly.

“Then why are you doing it?”

“Because...,” he started, but words petered out. He couldn’t—didn’t want to articulate his fears. How he had to see how Dream acted around them. If he had the same amount of fun. If he could even pull off a manhunt without George and Sapnap...

“They’re not going to stop him,” George said almost too sure. “They have no idea what they are getting into.”

“I heard from Punz that they were practicing running after him here.”

“Punz? What would Punz know?”

“Heard my name,” said the mercenary, appearing like some creepy supernatural being at the utterance of his name. Punz plopped onto Sapnap’s other side. “What’re we talking about?”

“The manhunt,” George said snippily. For reasons that Sapnap hoped were based on first impressions, George did not like the mercenary. Punz appeared around three months ago with

no memory of how the guy had stopped being dead. Jack had suggested that Punz must have crawled out of Hell on the mercenary's own merits like Jack had. Except since Punz was not as strong as Jack, the mercenary's memories had been wiped by one of hell's denizens.

The idea had been outrageous, but no one had any other ideas, so that's the one everyone went with. George had decided to be extra snippy and cold to the mercenary since his arrival, probably because he didn't like that anyone escaped Hell? Sapnap did not know for sure. Dream had always been better at reading George.

"So what are your bets? I'm putting my money on Dream defeating the dragon."

"That's because it's obvious. No one except Bad has any experience taking Dream on when he's on manhunt-mode. And Bad's Bad."

"Didn't Bad have the highest kill rate among you hunters?" Punz asked too casually.

George was glaring. Gamer glasses or not, Sapnap knew that expression.

"Why don't you go mining or something? You like shiny things. Go find them."

"I like getting paid," Punz snorted, blue-gray eyes rolling. "And I have money on this match."

"How much?" Sapnap asked, trying to defuse the tension building. Also he might be interested in a piece of the action himself.

"Two diamond blocks that Dream kills the dragon but only after getting down to half a heart at least twice."

"Half a heart twice?" George said doubtfully. "Without Sapnap cutting him down? No way."

“So what I’m hearing is you’ll take those odds?”

“ *Three* diamond blocks they *never* get him down to half a heart.”

“Deal,” said Punz too smugly. The mercenary had definitely planned that encounter. Sapnap had a thing for making friends with schemers.

His attention fell back onto the countdown. He remembered the adrenaline surging through him as the countdown counter slowly went down to zero because Dream didn’t need to wait for that zero. If he ran, they ran. And if he was running, Dream would be near impossible to catch. But they could catch him. They had to keep that goal in sight or else they would give up too soon.

“Did you get to talk to him before he left?”

Punz’s question distracted Sapnap from the shrinking number.

“No,” Sapnap scowled.

“Dream didn’t want to talk to us,” George said bitterly. “That’s what the Blade said.”

“Uncle Skeppy did take the letters we brought, so maybe he’ll finally respond to one of those,” Sapnap said, scowl fading in exhaustion. “Karl said we need to keep giving him space and time. Puffy agrees.”

“They are probably right since they’re both good with emotional stuff,” Punz said. The mercenary squirmed and somehow got them to give the guy more space on the coach. “Better than me anyway. Where is Karl? Did he travel off-server with Puffy?”



“Puffy went to visit her son, and Karl didn’t want to intrude. He’s upstairs looking through one of the albums. But Puffy said she’ll go with him if he finally gathers the courage to meet with Jimmy or any of our off-world friends.”

“Will you go with him?” asked Punz. Sapnap shook his head and pointed it back to the small numbered countdown. He didn’t want to answer any more questions. He didn’t want to think about how scared he was to go off-world. Not when he was unsure he would be let back in.

“It’s starting,” George said. He made himself more comfortable into Sapnap’s side. Sapnap didn’t even pretend to push him away. He wished he had convinced Karl to come watch this with them.

Punz knocked a shoulder against Sapnap’s.

“Interested in playing the odds?”

“Against you? No,” Sapnap scoffed. He let his free shoulder rest on Punz’s. “You’re not going to get me like you did George.”

“Hey!” George sputtered. “Are you saying I’m going to lose?”

“I’m just saying that betting against Punz isn’t a good idea. The guy doesn’t make a bet unless it turns a profit.”

“Dream isn’t going to go half-heart with these wannabes. Not a chance.”

“I think you’ve overlooked one very important fact,” Punz said smugly as the timer spun down to zero. “One of the hunters is the Blade.”

Sapnap caught sight of George’s paling face as the footage started with a group of five in the middle of a mangrove.

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The pain faded as the world swirled, and Dream found himself back at spawn. He collapsed back onto the large mangrove branches and let out the loudest scream. He had been so close. So close. How rusty had he gotten? Had all those chases prepared the newest hunters more than he thought they had? He had thought that trick with the beds in the End would have worked, but of course Techno had noticed it and kept the rest away.

“Done pouting?”

Dream slipped the mask off his face to glare more effectively at the entirely too smug hybrid perched on a branch above his.

“You usually lose the first manhunt with new hunters,” Bad comforted as the tall demon climbed up beside Dream. He patted Dream’s shoulder. “You’ll get us next time.”

“No he f\*\*\*\* won’t! The great and powerful Dream will never win a manhunt again now that I am here,” Tommy boasted, dangling from a branch somewhere below them.

“Language!” Bad huffed. “Do I have to get out the muffin jar?”

Tommy yelped as he lost his hold on the branch and fell into the muddy water below. He sputtered and pointed emphatically at Bad.

“You *wouldn’t*,” Tommy said in a strained whine.

“I would,” said Bad. A bottle labeled “Muffin Swears” appeared in his hand, and Dream vaguely wondered if he had it in his inventory this whole time. A plan involving filling the hunters’ inventories with junk flitted across his mind, but Dream shelved it for examination and experimentation later. The demon popped the bottle’s cork open and stored the cork

while pulling out an iron nugget. With a viciously wide grin, he placed the iron nugget into the bottle. “That’s one less muffin for you.”

“NOO!” Tommy cried dramatically. He grabbed his hair frantically and fell backwards. “My victory muffin!”

“I can’t believe muffins are how he has gotten you to stop swearing so much,” Ranboo said, setting himself on a branch near Techno.

“If you don’t get it then give me one of your victory muffins, Boob Boy,” Tommy called as he propped himself up by his elbows.

“I’m not getting in the way of whatever helps you better your self-control. Ender would find a way to kill me.”

“Coward!” Tommy howled, splashing water in Ranboo’s direction. The enderman hybrid hissed and scampered higher up the large mangrove tree.

“I ΔΙΛΛ ϩ Δσψ ζλκψ ΦΞΑΦ ΗΩΠ Λωωκ ΦΑζΦω ωιΦΞωκ ΩΠκ κωκΩλ’ ζ Ωκ  
ΩΠκ ΑλδωΛ’ ΔΩλκωκσΠΛ ΩΩλσωΦιΩλ ζΞΩΠΛ κ ΗΩΠ ΛωΦ ΦΞΑΦ σΩΠΛ  
Λι δ Πι κ ΦΩΠΩΞ Π ζ Ιλ ωωλ ΦΞω ζΛιδΞΦωζΦ ϩ Αλλωκ, ΩκωΦιλ.”

“Yeah, well, σΠ κ ΗΩΠ!”

Ender stared at the brat and then slowly turned to Dream. Dream smirked.

“What? What did I say?!” Tommy said quickly standing. “Dream, you said that was ‘f—”

“I’m going to stop you right there before you lose another muffin and my ears pay the price,” Techno snorted. “We’d better get back before Niki comes after us for leaving her with two hyper children for too long.”

“But we brought Tommy with us?” Bad said innocently.

“You know what,  $\mathbb{S} \cap \mathbb{M} \not\subset \mathbb{H} \cap \mathbb{N}$  and  $\mathbb{S} \cap \mathbb{M} \subset$  your muffins!” Tommy hissed. Bad snickered and put two more iron nuggets into the bottle. “Wait! That’s not fair! That’s not even a real curse!”

“But you said it was,” Bad countered.

“But it obviously isn’t because Dream’s a p\*\*—wimp.” Tommy sneered as if the weak wording offended him.

“You can take away as many muffins from the bottomless teenage pit as you want, but I’m going home and finding the best way to flaunt my victory over *the Dream* and gain the proper amount of clout,” Techno drawled. He took in the appearing screen through his glasses and pulled up the SMP’s coordinates.

Dream groaned. “I am never going to hear the end of this.”

“You shouldn’t have taken an L if you couldn’t handle the aftermath,” Techno smirked. The portal appeared, and Ender dove into it. He had been less than pleased over the entry biome of this seed for good reason. Tommy slogged through the portal after the other teen, likely hoping to curse the enderman hybrid out before Bad went through.

“Just think. If you win next time, then he’ll be the one who will never hear the end of it,” Bad encouraged. “Until then—We won! Muffins for everyone not named Tommy!”

Whooping with unrestrained joy, the demon leapt into the portal. Dream did not pout, but he did allow himself an annoyed huff. Techno snorted an amused squeal, which Dream

answered with his own annoyed one. Blood red eyes gave him an entirely too amused look, and sharp fingers poked into his side and jabbed him in the direction of the portal. One last, very low snort later, Dream stepped through.

Instantly, he stood in their shared living room. Tommy wore a scowl as Niki held his upper arm while Skeppy offered a raised-hackled Ender a towel. Peace squealed a delighted welcome and hug-tackled Dream's legs. Dream grabbed the small Piglin and swung him up and into his arms. Peace bumped their foreheads together and then sat happily in Dream's hold.

"Welcome back!" Niki said brightly. She dragged Tommy over to knock her forehead against his. "You were amazing. You got a lot closer than I would have."

"I am winning next time," Dream declared.

"I don't doubt it," Niki smiled. She held Tommy's caught arm up. "But I think I'll be more impressed if you can send this one back without him causing trouble."

"He started it!" Tommy said pointing at Ender.

"WΔWΔ IƆ I ƆIƆ, ΔQ QΔW IƆ σ QIΔ σ ΦQ ⊕ WLIWΔW H-QJ."

"I Ω ΔΔ," Niki warbled a bit too quietly. Ender blinked, and Ranboo stared at Niki's hair.

"You're learning fast," Ranboo said with a hint of jealousy. "I still haven't gotten the full hang of it."

"That's because Niki's awesome like that," Skeppy said. He squeezed in next to Niki and gestured for Dream to bend down a little. Dream did, and Skeppy bonked his hard head painfully against Dream's. Dream winced, and Skeppy giggled. "Still too hard? Gotcha. I'll get it next time."

“You know no headbutting Peace until you can do it to us without rattling our brains,” Niki reminded. She looked around. “Where did Bad go?”

“He already headed to the kitchen to bake the victory muffins,” Skeppy explained. She nodded and headed towards the kitchen with two eager teen tag-alongs while Peace squealed and caught the diamond golem’s attention. “Yeah, cutie?”

“Head come down,” Peace commanded, waving his hand as if pulling Skeppy towards him. Skeppy glittered and put his face parallel to the small Piglin’s. The small Piglin tilted forward, almost making Dream drop him. Centering the shift in weight, Dream steadied himself and Peace as the small Piglin placed his forehead onto Skeppy’s flat, smooth one. “Soft. See?”

“Aawww!” Skeppy cooed. He snatched Peace out of Dream’s arms and spun the small Piglin in a high circle before cuddling him close with a gentleness Dream didn’t think the silly diamond golem had. “How did Dream end up with a kid as cute and adorable as you?”

Peace squealed in happy surprise which made Skeppy briefly flinch. “Papa is the best! Peace loves Papa!”

“Does Peace love Uncle Skeppy too?” asked Skeppy still holding the kid close.

“Peace love Unka Skep too!” Peace squealed loudly. Skeppy flinched but then laughed loudly. He swung Peace around again before a taller figure grabbed Peace out of his hands. Relief and pleased smugness loosened in Dream’s chest. Techno held the happily snorting Peace in a careful grasp. Peace clambered out of the grasp briefly to headbutt the large Piglin hybrid but returned to the safety of the original hold quickly afterwards.

“Planning to beat my record on how far one can dropkick an orphan? Because you’re going to have to find another kid. This one’s got a passel,” Techno snorted.

“We were just having fun,” Skeppy pouted. He then grinned and glittered. “We were also talking about something important the kid wanted to show me. Want to see?”

“No,” Techno said warily, trying to step around Skeppy and make his way to the kitchen.

“Too bad because I want to show you.” Skeppy leapt up to catch Techno’s shoulder and balanced on the large Piglin hybrid’s side long enough to knock their heads together very loudly. Skeppy stumbled back to the floor while Techno staggered backwards. Dream slipped in next to Techno and grabbed Peace. If Techno wanted to fall, he was not going to do it holding Dream’s son.

“What was that?” Niki said bursting into the living room. Tommy ran in behind her, tripped over thin air, and fell flat onto the patchwork carpet. Ranboo timidly looked around Niki before shaking his head while Bad hurried in next to her. He helped the brat off the floor and stepped further into the room. Skeppy immediately slammed into him.

“Techno’s head is harder than mine!”

“What?” Bad squawked, reflexively trying to pry Skeppy off of him.

“Techno’s head is harder than literal diamonds!” Skeppy repeated in exaggerated tears.

“Unka Skep not know how to *greet* soft,” Peace squeaked from Dream’s arms, Piglin mixing with Human. “He hit Tech *protector* hard!”

“Skeppy,” Bad scolded. “We told you you have to be careful. You could easily break someone’s skull open! We’re lucky you did that to Techno. What would have happened if you had done that to anyone but Techno?”

“They would have died,” Techno said flatly. “And even with my necromancer bestie, that would be an unwanted outcome.”

“Necromancer bestie?” Dream repeated.

“It’s your best trait,” Techno answered without missing a beat.

“So you only keep me around in case someone dies?” Dream whined in a whisper. He had meant to be louder, to make it clear that the words were a joke. *(They were a joke—they had to be.)*

“Nah,” Techno said, tapping his forehead against Dream’s. The Piglin hybrid winced as he leaned back upright. “But I am not saying it isn’t a benefit to keeping you around.”

“Nobody should die no matter what,” Bad said. Walking fairly uninhibited despite the diamond golem still glomped to his side, Bad neared Techno and stretched out his arms but stopped them short of Techno. Techno huffed and stuck his head between them. Bad instantly inspected the Piglin hybrid’s forehead. The demon let out a relieved sigh. “That could have been worse. Nothing a little healing potion won’t fix.”

“See? He’s fine. How come no one else is freaking out? My head is made of literal diamonds!” Skeppy exclaimed.

“So you were trying to kill him?” Niki asked with her arms crossed and a shadow falling over her face.

“No! I knew he could take it! He’s the Technoblade! I just didn’t think that headbutting him would hurt *me* .”

“You’re fine, Skeppy,” Bad said wearily. His whole form slumped as the diamond golem shook his head.

“No it’s not! Look! Look! I have a crack!”



Bad dutifully looked down and frowned.

“Huh. There is a little bit of something,” Bad admitted, leaning down to take a closer look. He poked a small translucent crooked line on Skeppy’s forehead.

“OW! Stop! It hurts.”

“Maybe that will help you think twice before trying to take me down,” Techno said, striking a pose. “See, Chat. Technoblade never dies!”

“Great,” Tommy grumbled from where he was next to an exasperated Niki. “We’re never hearing the 𐐂𐐃𐐄 𐐅 𐐆-ing end of this.”

“Nope,” Ranboo agreed as he reentered the room and handed a healing potion to Techno.

“Have I ever told you that you’re my favorite?” Techno said as he used the potion.

“Of course he is,” Tommy muttered. He continued very loudly, “I was promised victory muffins!”

“Did someone say ‘victory muffins’?”

Dream slipped his mask back on and regretted giving into Tommy’s pleas. He then turned to see the last of the world’s teens standing nervously in the entrance hallway. He held out a jar or two of honey.

“I brought honey for victory desserts,” Tubbo said, fiddling with the glass bottles.

“That’s perfect! I was thinking honeybuns to go with Bad’s muffins,” Niki said, taking the two bottles from the short teen. “And I think you can convince Bad to make honey muffins.”

“Honey muffins coming right up,” Bad said as Ranboo quietly handed Skeppy a healing potion. The diamond golem went from glomping Bad to hugging a slightly awkward Ranboo.

“But he didn’t even take part in the Manhunt,” Tommy protested. “Shouldn’t the winners get to decide what muffins are made?”

“Sure,” Niki said. “Which ones do you want Techno? Boo? Ender?”

“Carrot,” Techno said.

“Beet would be good,” Ranboo suggested. “Ender would like some melon-based if possible.”

“Pumpkin-spice!” Tommy called out loudly.

“Carrot, beet, and melon coming up,” Bad said, walking back to the kitchen.

“And pumpkin-spice too,” said Tommy. The brat scrambled to follow after Bad.

“You have five iron nuggets in the muffin jar,” Bad reminded.

“Five! I had three!” Tommy insisted as their conversation faded into the kitchen. He stuck his head back into the room. “Back me up Tubbo!”

“As long as I’m getting honey muffins, I see no reason to,” Tubbo said with a shrug as he joined the brat.

“Come on, Tubs. I need you on my side.”

“Is it going to get me more muffins or less?”

“Traitor,” the brat accused. He stuck out his tongue and vanished back into the kitchen. Tubbo giggled and followed with Ranboo close behind.

*“Why did you give him a direct route into our house again?”* snorted Techno.

*“It made Tommy happy ,”* Dream grunted with heavy regret.

*“Not sure that’s a good enough reason,”* Techno chuffed. *“I say we revoke the right.”*

*“No!”* Peace squealed. *“Tommee should be happy! We all be happy now!”*

*“Yes, ”* Dream snuffled back. He pressed his head against Peace’s. *“We all be happy now.”*

Techno grunted a wordless agreement, and the two entered the growingly chaotic kitchen. Behind the mask, Dream smiled.

## Chapter End Notes

Ender Translation:

ᶏᵂᵂ, ᵒᶏᵂᵂᵂᶏ. ᶏᶏ ᶏᶏᶏᵂᵂᵂ ᶏᶏ ᶏᶏᵂᶏ ᶏᶏᶏ ᶏᶏᶏᶏᶏᵂᶏ ᶏᶏᶏᶏᶏᶏᶏ, ᶏᶏᶏ ᶏᶏ ᶏᶏ, – See, cretin. If anyone is dream's younger sibling, it is us.



[illegible][illegible]

ii}  $\Omega \Psi \chi$ ? – Is over?

$\mathcal{S} \circ \lambda \circ \Delta. \vdash \overline{\Phi} \text{ ' } \mathcal{U} \mathcal{U} \wedge \mathcal{W} \mathcal{W} \wedge \frac{1}{\#} \mathcal{W} \frac{1}{\#} \circ \vdash \lambda \sigma \Delta \vdash \overline{\Phi} \sqsubseteq \wedge \mathcal{O} \mathcal{U} \mathcal{W} \{ \circ \mathcal{W} \neq \Delta \neq \circ \wedge \mathcal{U} \}. - \text{For now.}$   
 It'll never be boring with Uncle Skep around.

$\Delta \wedge \nabla \triangle \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \sqcup \sigma \subseteq \overline{\Phi} \quad \overline{\Phi} \subseteq \Psi \quad \mathfrak{R} \rightsquigarrow \Psi \quad \overline{\Phi} \vdash \Delta \triangle \{ \mathcal{U} \sqcup \sqcap \}.$  – And we thought the cretin  
 was loud.

I thought you did not deign to understand our language?

Имя? – Your name?

$$\Omega \times \Psi \overline{\Phi} \mathfrak{I} \Lambda? - \text{Cretin?}$$
 $\Omega \times \Psi \overline{\Phi} \mathfrak{I} \Lambda - \text{Cretin}$ 

$\mathfrak{D}\aleph\psi\overline{\Phi}i_{\lambda}$ ? – Cretin? [For clarity reasons, I felt like I had to translate this word several times. It still felt silly.]

Ɱ⊔'↯ψ ⚠⋈ ∩∅∩⌀̄. – You're an idiot.

I will make sure that you never taste either our demon's or our angel's wonderful confections should you let that foul liquid touch us in even the slightest manner, cretin.

ⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩⲱ ⲛⲟⲩ – Fudge you

𐌆𐌋𐌗𐌸𐌰 𐌲𐌺 𐌹𐌵𐌰𐌶 – Fudge you

𐌆𐌋𐌗𐌸𐌰 – Fudge

𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 𐌹𐌆 𐌹 𐌗𐌹𐌗, 𐌺𐌰 𐌰𐌺𐌺 𐌹𐌵 𐌲𐌰𐌹𐌺𐌲 𐌶𐌰𐌰 𐌹𐌺𐌺𐌺𐌺 𐌹𐌵𐌺𐌺. – Even if I did, no one is going to believe you.

𐌹 𐌲𐌰𐌶𐌺. – I can.

𐌆𐌋𐌗𐌸𐌰 – Fudge [Same as before. Every time.]

Endings are not always a bad thing. It just means something new can begin.

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